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CANTON GOVERNMENT AND AMERICAN REACTION, 1921-1925

**A Research Paper prepared by
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(This paper was prepared for the study "Intellectual History of China" which was offered to officers at the Naval War College by Brown University. Ed.)

INTRODUCTION

The recent history of China is primarily the response of an ancient, stable civilization to the impact of Westernization and modernization in the 20th century. The transformation and modernization of China have been wrought by violent, revolutionary change; all attempts at evolutionary change through self-strengthening devices — political and social adjustments — have proved futile. After the collapse of the Manchus in 1911 a prolonged civil war among numerous provincial military governors kept China in turmoil. Self-seeking militarists tried to unite China through military force without success while attempting to conserve the ancient political, social, and economic institutions. Sun Yat-sen led the attack to break China completely out of her past and to adopt Western institutions. The early formation of the Kuomintang Party and its attempt to seize political power through the appeal of nationalism was a necessary first step in the process of political modernization.

In late 1920 Dr. Sun Yat-sen returned to Canton to establish a southern government in China. At first glance the Canton Government did not seem much different from other provincial governments which were vying for power against Peking. It was initially supported by southern militarists and attempted to widen its sphere of influence to other provinces by the traditional use of military force. But the Canton Government contained certain elements of a burgeoning national revolutionary movement which would sweep China within 5 years and become its most potent force and national spokesmen.

It possessed dedicated leaders who were responsive to the needs of the people and who became spokesmen for

their grievances. The Kuomintang Party organization, at first a loose coalition of petty bourgeoisie (small merchants and intellectuals), succeeded in overcoming most of their internal difficulties and attracting new followers. Additionally, the intellectuals, students, labor leaders, and other nonpolitical organizations became identified with the movement and formed a wide base of popular support. The eventual success of the movement, however, was not inevitable. It was plagued by financial difficulties, ignored by foreign powers, and generally obstructed by the existing military power centers of China. It lacked the traditional instruments of power: economic resources, military resources, and political recognition. Nevertheless, it captured the minds of the Chinese people and developed a national consciousness that would support its rise to power.

Foreign governments were more concerned with the constant civil war in North China than in the developments at Canton. The civil war "made it hard for many foreigners to see that the country was in the midst of a transition period, in which intense disorder might be accompanied by deep currents of constructive change acting underneath the surface."¹ They were hoping for a strong man to emerge and to "pull the country together under a conservative government which would restore order and safeguard foreign property."² American reaction to the Canton Government was mixed. Private Americans were generally sympathetic to the goals and principles of the Canton Government since it attempted to establish a representative and republican form of government. Official American policy was designed to support the Peking Government and to preserve the status quo of traditional Chinese relationships with provisions for evolutionary change.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the elements of the early Chinese nationalist movement, to trace their development, and to assess American reaction to the Canton Government. This study is applicable today because the United States is currently confronted with many potential revolutionary situations throughout the underdeveloped world, and our attitudes may determine our political relationships with these nations for many years. Some would argue that "the West missed a golden opportunity to influence the direction of the Chinese Revolution through cooperating with Sun Yat-sen"³ and that "the United States would perhaps be well-advised to adopt a bold policy of helping and guiding revolutionary movements in these (underdeveloped) areas, instead of trying to preserve the status quo or to support outmoded and reactionary leaders."⁴

This paper will be limited to the early stages of the national movement from the election of Dr. Sun as President of Canton to his death in March 1925. For convenience it is divided into two sections, the first period covering the election of Dr. Sun to his return to Canton in February 1923, the second period until his death in March 1925.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

This period encompasses the establishment of the Canton Government in May 1921 through the defeat of Sun Yat-sen by his former ally, General Ch'en Ch'ung Ming, in June 1922 and his exile in Shanghai, to his final return to Canton in February 1923. During this period the movement attracted the attention of the Chinese elite by reforms in the local government and general modernization of the city of Canton. It sought the support and sympathies of foreign governments and attempted to gain political recog-

nition. It widened its popular support, perhaps unconsciously, among the students and the labor organizations. Also, Sun Yat-sen established his first Soviet contacts.

The Canton Administration and Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Dr. Sun Yat-sen was elected President of the Canton Government on 5 May 1921 "by 222 votes of the original 1,000 members of Parliament."⁵ The vice consul in Canton, Ernest B. Price, wrote that:

... he ... was amazed at the display of popular interest in this event ... The (inauguration) parade was made up of and represented nearly every activity in the city: students, merchants, guilds, labor organizations, and but distinctly in the minority — governmental representatives ... The most interesting feature of the whole thing was the very apparent part taken in the demonstration by the common people ... In view of the more than usual lack of ordinary police surveillance, the order, cheerfulness and apparent unanimity of that huge crowd of people was remarkable.⁶

The Canton Government set about to reform the municipal government, to modernize the city, and to improve its financial administration. Dr. Sun's followers were "the aggressive young men of China, who were intent in giving a demonstration to China of what modernization may do for a city."⁷ The administrative acts of the government included the abolition of gambling, the reduction and reorganization of the Army, the abolishing of unnecessary governmental posts, and the improvement of taxation.⁸ A new pattern of local government was created, and Sun Fo was made mayor of the city. The appearance of the old port was changed: the ancient city wall was demolished; macadam roads and boulevards were constructed; the bund and the business center of the city were improved; public utilities were developed;

and parks and playgrounds were planned.⁹ The new look in Canton attracted the attention of China and, to a lesser extent, of the foreign powers and made the prospects of their government look brighter.

Foreign Program of Canton. It was quite natural for Sun Yat-sen to seek support and sympathy for his movement from the West since his personal background and democratic outlook pointed naturally in this direction. On becoming President of Canton he issued a Manifesto to the Foreign Powers in which he attacked the legitimacy and constitutionality of the Peking Government and requested the foreign powers to recognize his regime. He promised that "the legitimate rights of foreign powers and their nationals, duly acquired by treaty, contract or established usage, shall be scrupulously respected."¹⁰ Additionally, he made a special appeal to President Harding through his representative in Washington, Ma Soo. He especially looked to the United States for assistance in establishing a representative government in China, for withdrawal of its recognition of Peking, and for recognition of his government.¹¹ The letter was returned to the vice consul in Canton with instructions to forward it to Dr. Sun, although it had apparently been opened in the State Department.

By October 1921 Dr. Schurman, the U.S. Minister in China, wrote to the Secretary of State that "Canton (is) becoming a more important factor in national affairs."¹² The United States invited a Chinese delegation, composed of both northerners and southerners, to attend the Washington Naval Conference. The Canton Government steadfastly refused to participate in the delegation. Dr. Sun's views were expressed in a letter in which he said that:

In our eyes there is only one legal government in China. It is out of the question that the delegates of the Canton government should attend an international conference along with the delegates dispatched by the illegal government at Peking. Should the powers refuse to recognize the only legal government at Canton, we will never dispatch our representatives to the Washington Conference. It follows, therefore, that no items relative to the Republic of China, which have been deliberated upon and decided at the Conference will be binding upon our country.¹³

During the Conference the Sun Government kept up a constant hail of advice and pungent comment to the official Chinese delegation and the representatives of the Western Powers through its representative in the United States.

Ma Soo opposed the Ten Points submitted by the Peking delegation. The Canton Government's program included: "the withdrawal of international recognition from the Peking Government, noninterference by foreign powers in the political affairs of China, and the adoption of open diplomacy in dealings between China and the powers, and between the powers themselves with reference to China."¹⁴ Much of the Canton program would eventually be brought to fruition as their movement gained strength in China. Canton believed that the following principles relating to China should become applicable:

1. **Territorial Integrity:** (a) Settlement of the Shantung question by the cancellation of the Sino-Japanese treaty and notes of 1915, and recognition of the fact that China's declaration of war against Germany automatically terminated the Kiaochow leasehold. (b) Cancellation of the Sino-Japanese treaty and notes of 1915 relative to South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia: the railways in North and South Manchuria to be

converted into Chinese state-owned properties (c) Recognition by Great Britain of Chinese sovereignty in Tibet which would be granted autonomy. (d) Relinquishment of all leased territories. (e) The restoration to China of all Settlements and Concessions; during an interim period, their administration to be vested in a council consisting of an equal number of Chinese and foreign members, with a Chinese chairman. (f) The withdrawal of foreign troops, whether their presence was warranted by the treaties or not.

2. **Economic Integrity:** (a) Freedom from treaties imposing fiscal limitations of every sort. (b) Remission of the remainder of the Boxer indemnity payments, and the use of such funds for educational and industrial purposes. (c) The elimination of spheres of interest or influence.

3. **Administrative Integrity:** (a) The gradual abolition of consular jurisdiction by installments. (b) Japanese police agencies to be removed. (c) Telegraphic and wireless installations maintained in China by Foreign Governments and their nationals to be dismantled.¹⁵

Kuomintang Leadership and American Reaction. The Kuomintang Party cherished the ideas of establishing a representative and republican form of government in China. They represented a considerable bloc of the original Parliament that was formed after the Chinese revolution of 1911. When the Parliament was dissolved under Yuan Shih-kai, approximately 200 of its members eventually arrived at Canton. The Kuomintang, far from being a party of radical or even liberal revolutionists, was a loosely constructed coalition that relied for its support on the various groups that constituted the bourgeoisie, mainly small merchants and intellectuals. The Canton Government ostensibly functioned under the Kuomintang with Sun Yat-sen maintaining, for the most part, a personal and autocratic relationship with his supporters.¹⁶

The vice consul in Canton was impressed by the ability of the Canton leaders, their devotion to principles, and their concern over the welfare of the people.

These leaders of the Southern Government are enlightened men, acquainted with foreign ideas and methods, and, for the present at least, are making a praiseworthy attempt to demonstrate their ability to work together and to govern the people over whom they are exercising power to the satisfaction of the people themselves . . . All things considered I am of the opinion that it is to the interest of the United States to adopt towards these men who constitute the present *de facto* government of a considerable portion of South China an attitude of sympathy.¹⁷

Additionally, he stated that "I am also convinced that in this group of men, not merely Dr. Sun but the really large and loyal group of men who are supporting the principle and cause of democracy in South China, lies the only hope for China."¹⁸

But Mr. Price's views were definitely in the minority among State Department officials. These officials seemed to form their opinions of the Canton Government more on Sun Yat-sen's personality than on the competence and devotion of his followers and were ready to report on all sources of conflict or difficulty which would cause the demise of Dr. Sun. Generally, Sun was considered to be a visionary and impractical dreamer,

. . . who embarrassed his associates by his impractical and grandiose schemes. He is reported to be a man of great personal vanity, although sincere in his motives, and much given to initiating projects of national magnitude that he has not as yet in any case brought to fruition. His prestige is undoubtedly great in his own province of Kwangtung, but in the North he is regarded as at the best an impractical idealist.¹⁹

General Ch'en Ch'ung Ming, the Civil Governor and Commander of the Kwangtung forces, was generally considered to be the abler man of the two and the better administrator. In May 1922 when Sun had "dismissed" General Ch'en because he did not favor or assist the northern expedition, Dr. Schurman compared the two leaders in a telegram to the Secretary of State:

Sun is a born leader, agitator, fire-brand . . . Chen is lawyer, soldier, administrator. Ultimate goal of both is unified democratic China with provincial autonomy. Sun would march straight to Peking with his small and miserable army having sublime confidence in his own ability to establish and rule unified and perfect republic; Chen sees reasonable preparations are necessary. His own program is the political and economical development of Kwangtung and the spread by force of example and proven accomplishment of good democratic provincial governments.²⁰

In the north, General Wu Pei-fu had succeeded in overthrowing General Chiang Tao-lin and was advocating the formation of a constitutional government. Many Americans and the State Department favored General Wu and hoped that he would be able to unite China. However, he would not be able to form a constitutional government without the support of Sun Yat-sen who controlled about 200 members.²¹

Sun seemed ready to negotiate at first but then issued a statement posing as defender of the constitution against

. . . the militarists in North China and demanding for the protection of the nation two conditions: (1) punishment of men now confessing their crime who, in 1917, effected dissolution of parliament; (2) guarantee against future dissolution of Parliament and protection against militarism by organizing half of the troops into labor battalions under their own officers on terms of a fair living wage and reasonable hours of work.²²

Within 10 days of this telegram of Dr. Schurman to the State Department, Sun was overthrown by General Ch'en and forced to retire.

Official American attitude toward Sun Yat-sen may be best illustrated by the following excerpts of telegrams addressed to the State Department after Sun's defeat.

From Vice Consul in Canton (Huston) to Dr. Schurman: 'Sun appears to be willing to retire if allowed dignified exit. Hinted that if consular body would offer good offices might be acceptable.'

Schurman statement to the State Department: 'Mediation by foreigners might eliminate Sun Yat-sen more speedily but it would not permanently settle the issue which would inevitably return to plague the Chinese.'

'If Ch'en Ch'ung Ming himself cannot bring Sun's retirement the Peking government should grapple with the difficulty. Sun is the one outstanding obstacle to reunification which with disbandment of superfluous troops is the cardinal policy of President Li Yuan-hung and his cabinet and supporters . . . Now that nothing remains but the elimination of Sun, not victorious but defeated, it would seem that the undertaking should be left to the Chinese Government if Ch'en Ch'ung Ming cannot or will not accomplish it.'

'I venture to suggest that foreign mediation will dignify and magnify Sun Yat-sen and assure him of prestige in the future.'²³

American public opinion and sentiment toward the Canton Government does not seem to have been aroused in this early period. Events in China were generally reported in the back pages; editors and journalists generally favored the rise of some strong man or political leaders, such as General Wu Pei-fu. Canton's representative in the United States, Ma Soo, and Chinese residing in the United States continually tried to gain support of Americans to their cause at every opportunity.

According to an American correspondent to the *Shanghai Weekly Review*:

Almost to a man the Chinese residing in the United States comes from Canton or from the Canton district, and every one of them is a rampant adherent of the Canton Government with result that there is a peculiar situation in the public opinion of the United States about China The average American has heard so much about the glories of Canton and the alleged infamies of Peking, that he wonders why the United States Government continues to recognize the Peking Government.²⁴

The Development of Popular Support. Popular sentiment on political movements in the early 1920's was evident in only a slight minority of Chinese society, and public opinion was certainly not representative. The Canton Government, however, succeeded in attracting some measure of popular support even at its inception, as evidenced by the inauguration parade. The attitude of the Kuomintang leadership and the administrative acts of the Government further broadened its popular base, especially among the students, intellectuals, and labor organizations. However, Mr. Price observed that "the business people, particularly the larger ones, view the situation with a good deal of pessimism So far the Chinese commercial classes have refused to assume the burden of self-government, while at the same time complaining if those who do rule demand their assistance and participation."²⁵

That the students could be a major force in China was amply demonstrated during the May 4th movement. The students generally looked to the Kuomintang for leadership and invariably favored Sun Yat-sen as the leader of new China.

I suppose that if a straw vote were to be taken among the students

throughout China the result would be a complete victory for Sun Yat-sen in the North as well as in the South. Such is the impression conveyed by students in Peking, at least, for almost to a man they come out openly for Sun. But they have no leadership and their numbers are comparatively small.²⁶

Even during his exile to Shanghai, Sun's popularity continued to grow among the students. In February 1923 a ballot was taken by *Weekly Review of the Far East* "to ascertain the men held highest in public esteem in China. Sun Yat-sen's name headed the list, outranking by many votes the second favorite."²⁷ Dr. Schurman reported to the State Department in March 1923 that:

Students notably in Peking have since formation of Cabinet protested and paraded against Peng Yung Yi as Minister of Education. They had very generally the sympathy of their teachers, and Chancellor Ts'ai of National University Peking resigned and went away on strike. Apparently in protest against Government and police, who interfered with their recent lantern demonstration, some students have sent telegram to Sun Yat-sen addressing him as President of China, denouncing Premier and especially President Li and inviting Sun to lead his troops into Peking, drive away these two tyrants, and dissolve the illegal parliament.²⁸

On his return to Canton in February 1923, Sun was dragged from his automobile and carried in triumph to the platform to address a group of students at the Queen's University at Hongkong. "Even the British faculty had to admit that China's first President, though he might be a radical and a dreamer, was still the unrivaled conqueror of the minds of the China's coming generation."²⁹

The labor movement grew with astonishing speed and militancy in the early 1920's. These new organizations

were quite different from the guilds and were built on the ideas of the solidarity of labor and increasing class consciousness. These early movements were primarily directed to securing economic gains through the use of strikes and boycotts. The Canton Government was the first provincial government to legalize union organizations. In May 1922 the first national labor conference met in Canton under the leadership of Hongkong seamen who had won a substantial victory over the British earlier in the year. The conference was attended by delegates of 230,000 union members.³⁰

The strikes were effective in making economic gains and in increasing memberships.

Hundreds of labor unions have been formed, with an estimate membership of 500,000. Canton has over 200 unions, Shanghai, nearly 100 . . . In Canton in 1921, there were twenty-one strikes, only one of which failed. From 1919 to 1923, there were two hundred and seventy-nine strikes within the international settlement of Shanghai. Of the 69 more important strikes in China from June, 1921 to February, 1923, forty-two were completely successful, only a few of the remainder being total failures.³¹

The attitude of Sun Yat-sen to the labor organizations was in sharp contrast to that of other provincial leaders of China and was instrumental in convincing Maring that the Canton group was the nucleus of a national revolutionary movement.

When Maring came to China in the spring of 1921 and established connections with Sun Yat-sen, whom he first visited in Kwangsi, he decided that the main stream of Chinese nationalism flowed through Sun's Kuomintang. This belief was strengthened when in Canton and Hongkong in January 1922 a major seaman's strike took place and Maring found that the Kuomintang already had substantial

links to the young Chinese labor movement.³²

While Maring visited Sun in Shanghai in August 1922, "various political factions and representatives of twenty-seven labor organizations of Shanghai . . . pledged support to the deposed Canton leader on August 21."³³

Although the Kuomintang was making considerable progress among the students and labor organizations, many foreign observers reported that Sun Yat-sen was not as acceptable to other Chinese, although in no instance have these "Chinese" been clearly identified. Presumably, these opinions were formed from discussions with Chinese Government representatives and merchants who would come in close contact with foreigners. Dr. Schurman stated in May 1922 that "Sun has alienated sympathy of thoughtful Chinese and foreigners, but still strong with labor unions and radicals."³⁴ An American observer reported that "Sun Yat-sen is regarded by the Chinese with indifference and sometimes with mockery."³⁵ Another observed that:

Chinese opinion is much divided over the personality of Dr. Sun, in whom some see a dreamer and visionary of high but utopian ideals, who will lead his followers to destruction, while others have the very highest regard for his practical abilities. All, it seems are at one in granting to him the possession of the purest patriotism . . .³⁶

Summary. In this first period, foreign observers believed that Sun was defeated and that in any case he would never be able to extend his influence beyond Canton. He failed to gain recognition from the foreign powers but succeeded in attracting some Chinese followers to his movement, perhaps unconsciously. He failed to make complete use of their support, however, since he still relied on the traditional use of military force to gain power.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

When Sun Yat-sen returned to Canton on 21 February 1923 with the assistance of troops from Yunan Province, it may be concluded from the events that followed that he had decided on alternate courses of action to achieve power in China. In August 1922 Maring had "urged him to substitute a campaign of mass propaganda and organization for an attempt to recapture Canton by purely military means."³⁷ The arrival of Borodin in October 1923 marked the beginning of the reorganization of the Kuomintang, the establishment of a new army, and the launching of the mass movement. In 1923 Sun Yat-sen also turned from the Western Powers for support and accepted the assistance of the Soviets. He established more drastic means to secure finances for his government through increased taxes in Canton and through attempts to seize the custom houses. He launched a vigorous and effective campaign against foreign rights, unequal treaties, and foreign imperialism in general. By the time of his death in 1925, Sun Yat-sen was on the verge of successfully completing his life's work of revolution.

Foreign Program. It is questionable whether or not Sun Yat-sen had completely decided to seek the assistance of the Soviets on his return to Canton in February 1923. According to letters published in the *Hongkong Telegraph* in September 1922, he had been in secret correspondence looking toward an alliance of Germany, Russia, and China.³⁸ The Russian revolution had attracted him both by its programs and its spectacular success.

On the one hand, the existence of some similarities between his ideas and those of the Bolsheviks was indeed inspiring and reassuring to a

man like Sun, who had been frustrated in his revolutionary efforts. On the other hand, he could not but admire the Soviet regime for its ability to achieve what he failed to do in China.³⁹

On 1 April 1923, in an Associated Press dispatch, Sun Yat-sen stated that he would begin immediately to modernize Canton Province with the assistance of foreign experts in departments requiring foreign methods and that all nationalities would be welcomed in the financing of government enterprises, but American and British capital would be preferred.⁴⁰ Late in the spring of 1923 he made an appeal to other nations through Dr. Schurman who was then visiting Canton. He requested the United States to approach England, France, and other powers:

. . . on the proposal of a joint intervention in China for a period of five years . . . Sun Yat-sen had the plan worked out with characteristic detail. It involved foreign military occupation of all the provincial capitals and the lavish use of military and civil experts. The object was to set the provincial and national governments in order, after which elections were to be held, and the foreigners were to train the Chinese administration which was to supersede them.⁴¹

This proposal may not have been sincere, since he issued a Manifesto to the Foreign Powers on 29 June 1923 in which he blamed the militarists for civil war, disunion, and anarchy and blamed the foreign powers for supporting the Peking regime by granting it recognition.

But the Peking Government is not in fact or in law a government, does not perform the primary functions or fulfill the elementary obligations of a government, and is not recognized by the Chinese people as a government. The Foreign Powers, who must all along have realized the farce of their recognition, have been prompted to do

so by the notion that they must have some entity, though it be a nonentity, with which to deal. However, by their action, they have given Peking moral prestige and financial support in the shape of revenues under foreign control so that the Peking Government has been enabled to exist by virtue of foreign recognition and by that alone. Unconsciously perhaps, they have thus done something which they have professed they would not do, that is, intervened in China's internal affairs by practically imposing on the country a government repudiated by it.⁴²

Dr. Schurman felt that the United States should continue to recognize the Peking Government so as not to endanger foreign nationals or to jeopardize international peace among nations with an interest in China.⁴³

When Tsao Kun was elected President in October 1923 Sun Yat-sen reiterated his demands to the foreign powers not to recognize Peking.

I have to request Foreign Powers and their representatives in Peking to avoid any act which may be construed by new Peking usurper as an intimation or assurance of international recognition and support. The foreign recognition of Tsao Kun would perpetuate internecine strife and disorder and would be envisaged by Chinese people as a frustration of their declared will regarding an act which eats at moral fiber of the national character.⁴⁴

It was reported that Tsao Kun had bought the election for \$10 million. Dr. Schurman observed that on his election there was "no enthusiasm, no crowds, only police, soldiers, and rickshaw men in streets."⁴⁵

The recognition issue was relegated to a minor position in 1924 and early 1925 as anti-imperialism, abolition of extraterritoriality, the revision of "unequal" treaties, and the influence of Bolshevism became the major issues. On 31 December 1923, before a meeting of the YMCA in Canton, Sun is

said to have fully acknowledged his orientation: "We no longer look to the Western Powers. Our faces are turned toward Russia."⁴⁶

Financial Difficulties. Although many overseas Chinese and local merchants supported Sun Yat-sen's movement, the cost of maintaining an army and conducting campaigns against other provinces drained its resources and precipitated inflation. On his return to Canton in 1923 it soon became apparent that he would attempt other means to support his operations. It was reported that government land and temple sites were sold to private purchasers and that an order was issued to the effect that lands of persons who could not present complete title would be confiscated.⁴⁷ According to Dr. Schurman, the institution of oppressive tariff laws and exorbitant taxes made Sun Yat-sen unpopular in Canton.⁴⁸

In 1919 and 1920 the Canton Government had received a percentage of the funds collected in the custom houses through the Peking Government after China's international indemnities had been paid. In 1921 the Peking Government refused to allow any monies to be transferred to the Canton Government, although supposedly the money would be used for land reclamation, road building, and other public works projects. Between January and March 1921 Sun Yat-sen threatened the seizure of the customs revenues, but the United States upheld the opinion that it could only act as a trustee of the funds for the internationally recognized Government of Peking. Wu Ting-fang, on the other hand, believed that the United States "should consider themselves trustees not for a technically and momentarily recognized government such as the so-called Peking Government but for the Chinese people who are the ultimate sovereign."⁴⁹

In September 1923 Sun Yat-sen submitted a telegram to the diplomatic body requesting that surplus funds be turned over to the Canton Government and stating that the money was being used against them by the financing of northern militarists.⁵⁰ The diplomatic body postponed any decision on Sun's telegram since there was, in their view, a possibility that General Ch'en would return to power.⁵¹ Sun apparently shifted his intentions from seizing custom houses to declaring the ports under his control to be free ports "i.e., to collect no dues or duty on goods entering the port but thereafter to levy on all merchandise in Chinese hands such taxes or exactions as they may see fit to impose up to any amount."⁵² By December 1923 Sun was standing firm on his demands and again threatened the seizure of the custom house. He declared that "seizure of surplus is only an internal affair, that if foreign powers should resort to forcible measures it would clearly be an action of intervention in China's internal affairs in favor of Northern militarists."⁵³ Secretary of State Hughes recommended to President Coolidge that a show of naval force should be undertaken in Canton as a precautionary measure.⁵⁴ American naval forces were anchored in Canton from December 1923 to mid-April 1924. The United States was singled out for attacks during the naval demonstration in the hopes of influencing public opinion in the United States. It was noted in the Chinese press that the Canton Government was starting antiforeign agitation and asserting that the enormous customs revenues were needed to reduce taxes and the cost of living.⁵⁵ In commenting on the feelings of the Peking Government, Dr. Schurman stated that:

. . . it seems to me that Koo's (Wellington Koo) feelings are torn between gratification that probably his custom

house will be saved to him and anguish that the saving is going to be done by foreigners. In general the Peking Government feels the same, and in high official circles there appears, curiously enough, a kind of sneaking sympathy for Sun Yat-sen's claims.⁵⁶

Kuomintang Party Organization and Popular Support.

In 1922 Maring had urged on Sun Yat-sen the necessity for reorganizing the Kuomintang Party and for broadening the base of the national movement. Borodin, on his arrival, was determined to strengthen the movement among the peasants and working classes but "was also convinced that a revolution would not be successful in China without the cooperation of all the groups in the Kuomintang."⁵⁷ At the First Kuomintang Congress in January 1924, it was evident that the administrative machinery of the Kuomintang had been reconstructed, that a highly disciplined party organization had been formed, and that a party program had been formulated. The party organization included Communist cadres who had been admitted as individuals. The party platform was designed to attract workers and peasants through liberal reforms in economic and social conditions. Sun, although interested in economic and social problems, had never previously reached the great masses of the country with his revolutionary principles.⁵⁸

The labor and peasant organizations, however, did not automatically accept the new leadership of the Kuomintang. Both organizations had been gaining strength in 1923. The labor organization was "marked by its independent spirit and militancy . . . There is also evidence that they were skeptical and suspicious of the new 'allies' who were springing up in Canton."⁵⁹ The Kwangtung Peasant Association was already organized before the middle of 1923.⁶⁰ When Sun announced the

"land to the tiller" policy in August 1924, the mass peasant movement in China gained momentum.⁶¹

The reorganized Kuomintang Party did not attract all Chinese, however. In the summer of 1924 a Merchant's Volunteer Corps was organized by the British and wealthy compradores of Hongkong and Canton to challenge the Kuomintang. According to one observer the organization of this centralized and militarized body was an expression of resentment against Sun's regime which was oppressing the Cantonese by the introduction of provincial mercenaries and by levying excessive taxes.⁶² In October the force of newly formed Whampoa cadets, workers' battalions, and peasant guards defeated the Merchant Volunteers and disarmed them. "Scenes of desolation and carnage marked many sections of the city after that fateful day, which aroused a wave of anti-Sun feeling among Cantonese the world over."⁶³ Additionally, the opposition of the commercial classes was reported as follows:

The United Commercial Guilds of Kwangtung Province on September 24 made public a recommendation to the overseas Chinese to withdraw their financial support from Dr. Sun, denouncing him at the same time in the strongest terms. They were supported by the Committee of the Kwangtung Gentry, representing 96 districts in the province, who, meeting at Fatshan, late in September, repudiated the head of the Canton Government, and called it 'irregularly constituted', without even the support of the sentiment and goodwill of the local people. Finally the Kwangtung Provincial Assembly, on September 30, warned the League of Nations that Sun was 'a rebel disturbing local peace, and also disturbing international goodwill by his misrepresentations.' In all these messages, evidence of tyrannical government was adduced.⁶⁴

The Rise of Antiforeignism.

The Manifesto of the First Kuomintang Congress attacked the role of foreign powers in China.

In somewhat Russian fashion the Manifesto formally made anti-imperialism a very important part of Chinese nationalism. It demanded the abrogation of the unequal treaties and the abolition of foreign concessions, extraterritoriality, foreign control of customs, etc. It also offered friendship to those countries which would voluntarily renounce their special rights and privileges in China.⁶⁵

Throughout 1924 Sun Yat-sen denounced the foreign powers for their imperialism. The antiforeign slogans struck a responsive chord among a large cross section of Chinese society, which bolstered the revolutionary movement. Blaming China's ills on the foreigners fired the imagination and evoked strong feelings among the Chinese who had been suffering from civil war, economic deprivation, and social unrest for a long period. The antiforeign movement became not merely an ideological symbol, but a rationalization of the current crisis in China.

Less interested in ideas than in profits, the merchants of the treaty ports, many of whom had industrial connections, desired customs autonomy in order to secure protection for domestic manufactures. The financial classes resented the privileged position enjoyed by certain foreign banks in which not only customs receipts but salt revenues were regularly deposited. Workers in foreign-owned factories, although in many cases receiving wages in excess of any to which they had even been accustomed, were restless under the steady discipline of the modern factory. And even the peasant, normally content to till his fields and raise up sons to worship at the ancestral altars, began to feel vaguely that the foreigner was somehow responsible for the manifold

ills from which the country suffered. For the foreigner, guaranteed special rights under the treaties, seemed to be largely immune from the oppression under which the natives themselves were compelled to suffer.⁶⁶

A "Rights Recovery Movement" developed in 1924 among the teachers of eight Government schools in Peking. In July the teachers issued a declaration reading in part:

Unfortunately, however, internal disorders have led to invasions by other powers and various kinds of administrative affairs are supervised by foreigners, and practically every movement of the people is watched by them. Thus the finances of the country get worse, and the people become weak. They are oppressed by the powers as if they were their servants. . . . We think that all former treaties should be cancelled and replaced with new ones giving equal treatment, thus allowing the people of China a chance to become an independent race in the world, enjoying an equal status with the white race.⁶⁷

In his Manifesto on the Northern Expedition in September 1924, Sun Yat-sen linked the relationship between militarism and imperialism. "The direct cause of our civil war during the last thirteen years has been militarism, and the indirect cause has been imperialism."⁶⁸ On his trip north to Peking in December 1924 he issued at Shanghai "a vigorous statement against foreigners and their wrongs to China, and voiced the already current criticism of missionaries as running-dogs of imperialism."⁶⁹ He also stated that:

. . . the foreigner in China acted like a king and insisted on being treated like one. For thirteen years, foreigners had been engaged in stirring up trouble in the country. Once foreigners were placed under Chinese law, this interference in China's domestic affairs could be prevented, and

it might even have a salutary effect if one or two foreigners were shot for encouraging civil commotion.⁷⁰

Sun Yat-sen continued the denunciation of the foreign powers, the demand for revision of unequal treaties, and the abolition of all special privileges throughout his speeches in 1924. But Dorothy Borg would observe that foreigners were impressed only after the May 30th incident by the amount of latent antiforeign hostility that was present throughout China. "They continued to think 'China' in terms of conditions in the North and in the Yangtze Valley and remained relatively unaware of the developments within the Kuomintang."⁷¹

Other than a brief telegram from Dr. Schurman to the State Department dated 28 June 1922 in which he stated, "I do not believe nor have I found anyone here who believes that a recurrence of antiforeign sentiment leading to attacks on foreigners like those of the Boxers can be considered as a probability for the Chinese of the Twentieth Century,"⁷² little mention is made of antiforeign feeling in the State Department records until the fall of 1924. Chargé d'affaires Bell reported to the Secretary of State on 8 September 1924:

Apparently in connection with a recent movement reported from time to time in the press that certain radical Chinese wish to proclaim September 7th as a day of national humiliation since Boxer protocol signed on that date, printed handbills headed 'To Foreigners' were distributed yesterday in the Legation Quarter and vicinity north of Chienmin warning foreign diplomats and citizens that Chinese can no longer tolerate further acts of violence and insults by our Governments and threatening our lives if we do not give up predatory treaties which strangle China and protocol of 1901. I do not attach any great importance to this occurrence

but send it for what it may be worth as straw in the wind.⁷³

In November and December 1924, American diplomats recognized the popularity of the movement to revise or cancel the special privilege treaties. General Feng Yu-hsiang, the Christian general, had gained control of Peking and a Provisional Government was established under Tuan Chi-hui. The Chargé in China (Mayer) considered that the conservative leaders of the north "would not be able to oppose such a popular movement and might even have to join with it,"⁷⁴ and that "the radical wing of Kuomintang Party and the Soviets (might have) their day in Peking."⁷⁵ The British proposed a conference:

. . . to inform Chinese authorities and people of the continued desires of these powers, as evidenced at Washington Conference, to take up with China, at the very earliest moment that she puts her house in order, the question of treaty revision and these powers to this end would support in every proper way any government in China which would show a capacity for undertaking the task of restoring law and order in the country.⁷⁶

However, the British also felt that the powers should not recognize any administration set up in Peking who were "seeking to incite the Chinese people against the friendly attitude of the powers."⁷⁷ On 24 November 1924 in a telegram to Ambassador Kellogg, Secretary Hughes stated that if the Chinese adopted a policy of cancelling the "unequal treaties,"

. . . it would without doubt bring forth a degree of enthusiasm and popular approval such as no recent Chinese regime has been able to win. Should the powers unite in opposition to such a policy, it seems likely that the Chinese would be able to render of no worth foreign treaty rights by

mere passive resistance if not by the use of more aggressive means such as boycotts.⁷⁸

Although American officials were convinced of the unanimous public approval of the rights recovery movement, they were less sensitive to the amount of antiforeign and anti-Christian hostility that was widespread among the Chinese people. Anti-Christian demonstrations were held throughout China over the Christmas holidays, and the churches "were denounced as tools of foreign imperialism and capitalism."⁷⁹ However, the vice consul in Canton stated that "if there has been any increase of antiforeign feeling there is no evidence of any hostility to foreigners."⁸⁰ Also, the consul general reported on 11 January 1925 that "none of our businessmen have received any intimations from interior representatives of anti-Christian move," but that:

Missionaries and educators have received reports of anti-Christian move from interior correspondents but the consensus of opinion at present is that the move is but slightly more extensive than in 1922, that it is as well organized but not so intelligently directed, that the move is a natural sequence of the Chinese educators' challenge of mission education and that thus rivalry will likely continue over a long period. It has elements that may cause antiforeign propaganda but as yet it is not apparent. The agitation is purely anti-Christian education or antimission school to date.⁸¹

Dr. Hawks Potts, at a meeting of the American church mission board, was less optimistic.

He stated that the anti-Christian move looks worse than he thought at first and he regards it to be political. He stated the situation in connection with anti-Christian propaganda is be-

coming more and more serious and is looked upon by clear-thinking good educators and leaders as a dangerous thing not only to the Christian institutions but to the nation at large.⁸²

American popular opinion also assessed that the antiforeign feeling was primarily directed against the "unequal treaties and the anti-Christian feeling against the work of the Christian missionaries and the schools under their direction." As early as 1923 one observer wrote that "no one who has studied the recent growth of public opinion in China can believe that China will much longer accept international obligations which have been forced upon her."⁸³ Another wrote later that "is it to be wondered at heart every Chinese is antiforeign, that his slumbering hatred of the men who so treat him and his country will spring into flame whenever and wherever possible."⁸⁴ A correspondent for the *North China Daily News* in Shanghai wrote on 7 January 1925,

. . . an article declaring that a serious wave of antiforeign and anti-Christian feeling is sweeping across China. The writer attributes the causes to the failure of the present rulers who are attempting to deflect the popular wrath from themselves to the foreigners, also to the large growth of Christianity recently and the Bolshevik poison.⁸⁵

The movement was effective in the establishment of a commission on extraterritoriality that had been promised at the Washington Conference. Sun Yat-sen's protests against imperialism brought a greatly enlarged popular following. "Sun Yat-sen made his appeal to an emerging national consciousness, strongest in its racial form of prejudice against foreigners; he appealed also to fear: fear of racial extinction and fear of economic pressure."⁸⁶

American Attitude toward Bolshevism. American officials were primarily concerned that the Soviet influence in the Kuomintang Party would cause the radical revision or cancellation of the treaties. In late 1924 Mr. Mayer considered the possibility of the conservative leaders, Tuan Chi-hui and Chang Tso-lin, joining the Kuomintang and believed that if they did join "that there will be the probability if not certainty that the Chinese Government will demand treaty revision or cancellation."⁸⁷ Chang Tso-lin expressed concern over the Bolshevik influence in the Sun Government and wanted the foreign governments to intervene since it was really not an internal but international matter. But Mr. Mayer assessed that Chang's fears were primarily due to his own unstable position and that he desired "the foreign powers to take some action which will permit conservative Chinese leaders to work with them and prevent Bolshevik influence from predominating in China."⁸⁸ Mayer also had "a grave apprehension that extreme Kuomintang and Soviet influence may dominate Peking."⁸⁹

Mr. Mayer believed that the Bolshevik influence and activities were primarily a matter for domestic Chinese administration and not a matter for international concern or intervention. The Secretary of State concurred with Mr. Mayer's observations.

I would point out with respect to Marshal Chang's contention that it is world-wide and international, that the American Government cannot concern itself with the matter except in case American interests are directly involved. The serious aspect of propaganda directed from Moscow is, however, fully appreciated by this Government.⁹⁰

Divided opinions existed on whether or not the Sun Government was com-

pletely under control of the Soviets. In October the vice consul in Canton (Jenkins) reported that "the Sun Government is completely under domination of Soviet agents."⁹¹ Another consul believed that "Sun was not an exponent of Bolshevism but radical nationalism, although he was willing to utilize the Bolsheviks in his political maneuvers and that he had taken pains to disassociate his political movement from Bolshevism."⁹²

It seems likely that "the essence of the Kuomintang-Communist alliance was a marriage of convenience to last as long as their respective interests coincided."⁹³

Summary. With the assistance of the Soviets, Sun's national revolutionary movement gained momentum through a reorganized party organization, a party platform, a new army, and a propagandistic appeal to the Chinese masses. Foreign governments, including the United States, were not particularly knowledgeable as to the direction or to the growing enthusiasm of the movement. They assessed the Kuomintang programs and policies in the light of how these actions would most immediately affect traditional relationships and foreign properties in China and not in the light of an emerging national consciousness. Their reaction was tuned to the necessity for evolutionary change rather than to a recognition that the situation demanded revolutionary change.

CONCLUSIONS

The Chinese national revolutionary movement in its early stages is representative of the conditions in many emerging nations today. Lack of a national consciousness, squalid economic and social conditions, a crumbling traditional society that has lost

authority, a general disaffection of the intellectuals and the young, all of these elements were present in China. Although the Kuomintang Party attracted some Chinese, it lacked in the beginning the necessary organization and mass popular support to be truly effective. The students, labor and peasant organizations remained relatively without political leadership until early 1924, although each was growing in strength and attracting more followers.

Soviet assistance and direction provided the impetus to change the Kuomintang's organization, to establish an attractive party program for the peasants and workers, and to abandon the traditional means of gaining power through military force. With Soviet assistance and recommendation, Sun Yat-sen began to emphasize in 1923 the importance of mass propaganda and in a series of speeches from January to August 1924 outlined his program for the future of China. The combination of Soviet methods and Sun Yat-sen's popularity and leadership enabled the Kuomintang to break out of Canton and become the most potent political movement in China.

As late as the fall of 1923, no foreign government would believe in the Kuomintang's ability to spread its movement throughout China. Sun Yat-sen was a visionary, a popular radical, an impractical idealist, who could never become a "responsible statesman" and a strong leader to unify China. He was obstructing all efforts of the conservative leaders to establish a strong, unified government and should be defeated in dishonor.

The main concern of the American officials was the continuing civil war in North China and the financial difficulties of the Peking Government which affected American commercial and missionary interests. If any change was to be brought about in foreign

rights, extraterritoriality, or customs autonomy, it would be discussed on condition that China "placed her house in order" and would only become effective through "mutual agreement of the contracting parties." But Sun Yat-sen maintained that China would not solve its difficulties until the foreign powers loosened their grip on China. Only after the antiforeign and anti-Christian movement gained momentum in 1924 did the foreign powers pay heed to Chinese thought and pronouncements. As Paul Monroe has stated, Americans paid too much attention to what they thought and not to what the Chinese were thinking.

Many factors seem to have contributed to this slow response by the United States to the nationalist developments in China. The United States had returned to isolationism after the First World War, and what foreign policy was implemented was oriented toward Europe. Chinese affairs affected only a small percentage of the American population, commercial and military interests. Until 1924 newspapers and periodicals granted only limited space in the back pages to events in China. The return of Chinese missionaries to the United States in 1924 to appeal for the Chinese missions and the eruption of the Shanghai incident on 30 May 1925 evoked more public response and increased awareness of the Chinese problem. It was only then that steps were taken by the United States to implement some of the provisions that had been promised China in the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-22.

The change in U.S. Administration and the appointment of Kellogg as Secretary of State in early 1925 resulted in two important decisions on China. Secretary Kellogg recognized that with the growth of antiforeign feeling some of China's demands would

have to be met "at an appropriate time," in particular the revision of treaties, extraterritoriality, and customs autonomy. Secondly, the United States would assume a greater leadership role by formulating its own China policy, if necessary. Previously, all policies had been made in concert with the other foreign powers, and the United States had normally acquiesced to the policies of Great Britain.

The telegrams of Ernest Price, vice consul in Canton, to the State Department proved to be accurate and timely in their assessment of the situation in Canton and the Kuomintang but were seemingly ignored by State. Two factors may have contributed to this situation. The sheer size of China, the intensity of the civil war, the number of political and military factors, the lack of direct contact of the diplomatic mission to Chinese personalities other than governmental representatives and large merchants, all played a role in presenting a distorted view of the Chinese problem, especially to the diplomatic representative in Peking. Secondly, the consular officials and the diplomatic

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corps were administered by separate organizations until 1925 when both were unified under the State Department. The political opinions of consular officials were probably given short shrift.

Certain lessons can be drawn in hindsight from the American experience with the early development of the Kuomintang. It would seem to me that the first requirement for American officials abroad is the development of empathy and sensitivity to foreign sentiment as expressed not only by the current leadership and ruling elite, but also by the masses of peasants, workers, intellectuals, and students. The choice of American policy is not limited on

the one hand to guiding and supporting revolutionary movements, nor on the other to preserving the status quo and supporting reactionary leaders. It is seriously doubted that any foreign observer can thoroughly identify the myriad political, economic, and social factors and understand the personalities and motivations of the major actors in revolutionary situations while in progress. Any nation is constrained in its ability to assist in the modernization of a traditional society and to build effective economic, social, and political institutions in a foreign country. A more prudent, politically practical course of action would seem appropriate.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dorothy Borg, *American Policy and the Chinese Revolution 1925-1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 15.
2. Foster R. Dulles, *China and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 167.
3. Leng, Shao Chuan and Norman D. Palmer, *Sun Yat-sen and Communism* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 175.
4. *Ibid.*
5. U.S. Dept. of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1936), v. I, p. 329.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
7. Lyon Sharman, *Sun Yat-sen: His Life and Its Meaning* (New York: Day, 1934), p. 221.
8. *Foreign Relations*, p. 325.
9. Sharman, p. 221.
10. *Foreign Relations*, p. 336.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 338.
12. *Foreign Relations*, p. 349.
13. *North China Herald*, 1 October 1921, p. 11, quoted in Robert T. Pollard, *China's Foreign Relations, 1917-1931* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 208.
14. Pollard, p. 212 (footnote).
15. *China Review* (New York), December 1921, p. 341-342, quoted in Pollard, p. 212 (footnote).
16. Sharman, p. 214.
17. *Foreign Relations*, p. 324.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
19. *Foreign Relations*, p. 324.
20. *Foreign Relations*, 1922, v. 1, p. 706-707.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 712.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 718.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 724.

24. "Fighting China's Home Battles in the United States," *Literary Digest*, 21 January 1922, p. 27.
25. *Foreign Relations*, 1921, p. 334.
26. Henry C. Fenn, "The War Lords of China," *Current History*, March 1922, p. 922.
27. Sharman, p. 249.
28. *Foreign Relations*, 1923, v. 1, p. 504.
29. Gardner L. Harding, "China, Ill-governed and Bankrupt, Yet Prosperous," *Current History*, May 1923, p. 324.
30. Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 65.
31. A. Percival Finch, "Industrial Awakening of China," *Current History*, June 1925, p. 428.
32. Isaacs, p. 62.
33. John C. Griggs, "Sun Yat-sen and Chinese Unity," *Current History*, October 1922, p. 137.
34. *Foreign Relations*, 1922, p. 706.
35. Nathaniel Peffer, "One of Asia's Three Great Moderns," *Asia*, August 1924, p. 591.
36. "China: the Sick Man of the Far East," *Current History*, September 1921, p. 1038.
37. Isaacs, p. 62.
38. Sharman, p. 245.
39. Leng and Palmer, p. 51.
40. Harding, p. 325.
41. Sharman, p. 250.
42. *Foreign Relations*, 1923, p. 512.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 514.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 519.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Sharman, p. 253.
47. Payson J. Treat, "The Far East," *Current History*, February 1924, p. 704.
48. *Foreign Relations*, 1923, p. 519.
49. *Foreign Relations*, 1921, p. 324.
50. *Foreign Relations*, 1923, p. 552.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 555.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 554.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 564.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 555.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 577.
56. *Foreign Relations*, 1923, p. 566.
57. Borg, p. 16.
58. Leng and Palmer, p. 80.
59. Isaacs, p. 66.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
61. Leng and Palmer, p. 81.
62. *The China Year Book 1925-1926* (Tientsin: Tientsin Press, n.d.), p. 849.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 851.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 850.
65. Leng and Palmer, p. 79.
66. Pollard, p. 288.
67. *China Weekly Review*, 2 August 1924, p. 291, quoted in Pollard, p. 289-290 (footnote).
68. Sharman, p. 301.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

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70. *Japan Weekly Chronicle*, 11 December 1924, p. 790-791, as quoted in Pollard, p. 292 (footnote).
71. Borg, p. 19.
72. *Foreign Relations*, 1922, p. 721.
73. *Foreign Relations*, 1924, p. 370.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
79. *Foreign Relations*, 1925, v. I, p. 590.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*, p. 723.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 724.
83. Tyler Dennett, "American Policy in the Far East," *Current History*, July 1923, p. 602.
84. Frank H. Hodges, "The Foreign Grip in China," *Current History*, November 1923, p. 288.
85. *Foreign Relations*, 1925, p. 722.
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88. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
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It follows then as certain as night succeeds day, that without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it everything honorable and glorious.

*George Washington: Letter to
Marquis de Lafayette,
15 November 1781*