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Dear Mr. Rogers:

On November 21-23 China held a national election. Some people in China claim that this event marks "the beginning of a new era" in China's history. Others cynically dismiss the whole performance as a "farce". Without agreeing with either extreme one can say in any case that it was an interesting experiment.

Eleven months ago, on December 25, 1946, a national body of appointed representatives meeting in Nanking accepted the final draft of a new constitution for China. The Chinese Communists would have no part of it. Some other non-Kuomintang groups likewise refused to have anything to do with it. But the Nanking Government proceeded with plans to put the new constitution into effect by December 25 of this year.

The new Chinese constitution has many similarities with constitutions elsewhere, but in some respects it is unique. According to its provisions, the principal government organs are the five "Yuan": Executive, Legislative, Judicial, Control, and Examination. Above these bodies, however, are a strong executive, the President, and a National Assembly. The National Assembly is designated as the group which is to "exercise political powers on behalf of the whole body of citizens". Actually, however, its functions are very limited. Unless called into special session it meets once every six years. Its functions are the election (and the recall) of the President and the Vice-President, and the amendment of the constitution (or ratification of amendments proposed by the Legislative Yuan). In short, the real job of governing is left to the President and the five Yuan. Nonetheless, the National Assembly is an important body, in theory at least, for it is the ultimate check which the people can use against a strongly centralized government, and it is elected by universal suffrage.

Besides the National Assembly, there are two other major national bodies which are elected according to the new constitution. The Legislative Yuan, which is the "highest legislative organ of the state", is chosen by a general election every three years. It is the organ which corresponds most closely to legislatures in the western democracies. It is vested with considerable power, including the power to pass legislation by two-thirds vote over the veto of the President and his appointed Executive Yuan. It is a unicameral

body, however, and it is divested of the powers of constitutional amendment (other than making proposals) and of impeachment, which are placed in the hands of the National Assembly and the Control Yuan. The Control Yuan is elected not by direct suffrage but by local councils in the various territorial and functional administrative units into which China is divided. It is a unique body with "powers of consent, impeachment, rectification, and auditing". The Control Yuan is a sort of permanent investigating body to discover violation of the law or neglect of duty by government groups and personnel, and it can not only request rectification but can institute impeachment of any public functionary in the central government or local government for neglect of duty or violation of law.

These three bodies, the National Assembly, the Legislative Yuan, and the Control Yuan, are the ones which had to be elected if the new constitution was to be put in operation by December 25 of this year. The election of members of the National Assembly was to be first. Originally it was scheduled to take place in October of this year. Then it was postponed until November 21-23. During the first two weeks of November there was considerable speculation about further postponement, and some people predicted indefinite delay, but the Government finally squelched all rumors by declaring that it was determined to carry out the election regardless of all difficulties and obstacles. It announced that the National Assembly election would take place on November 21-23 as scheduled and that the election of Legislative Yuan representatives would take place a month later. The National Assembly would then meet on December 25 to elect the President and Vice-President of the Republic, to end the "period of political tutelage", and to inaugurate constitutional, democratic government in China.

Great difficulties faced the Government and the country in carrying through this decision to go ahead with the election. Some of the difficulties were inherent in the present state and level of development in China; others were peculiar to the particular time.

There have been elections in China before, for example during the early years of the Republic and during the recent war, but always on the basis of a limited franchise or including only a relatively small geographical area. This election was to be China's "first real national election", or at least its first attempt at one. It is obvious that the knowledge and background gained only by experience, and by trial and error, were lacking.

The size of the theoretical electorate was awesome. The constitution, and the electoral laws supplementing it, give the right to vote for National Assembly representatives to all mentally fit citizens, male and female, over the age of 21 who have not been convicted of treason, opium smoking, or corruption. There is no literacy requirement. Never having been able to conduct a national census, the Government didn't really know how large China's voting population was, but the General Election Office (under the

Ministry of the Interior) estimated that 250 million people were qualified to vote throughout the country.

A large majority of China's potential voters are illiterate. Statistics on literacy are as rare and as unreliable as other statistics in China, but election officials stated that 70 percent of the voters were expected to be illiterate.

Even disregarding the civil war, the political conditions necessary for a real election contest did not, and do not, exist. For twenty years the Government of China has been a one-party government. The coincidence of the Kuomintang and the Government was legally stated and defined in several constitutional documents. Although at various times many non-party members have participated in the Government, and although political groups and parties other than the Kuomintang have been organized, the Kuomintang maintained its monopoly of power within the National Government during what was called the "period of political tutelage" in the phraseology of Sun Yat-sen. The only other political group which developed actual power in China during this period was the Communist Party. Like the Kuomintang, it too has been more than a party, for it has an army, an administration, and a government of its own, and furthermore it refused to have anything to do with the new constitution or with the election. Within the past few years several third parties or groups have come into being. The most important of these were the Democratic League, the Young China Party, and the Democratic Socialist Party. The latter two were willing to participate in the Kuomintang-controlled Government; the Democratic League was not. Last month the Democratic League was outlawed for collaboration with the Communists. The groups remaining to participate in the election, therefore, were the monolithic Kuomintang and two small minor parties to which few people credited much support or power. The institution of the new constitution was proclaimed as the end of one-party government and the beginning of multi-party politics in China, but in this first election there was no real basis for a political contest.

The inflationary effect of the cost of the election gave pause to some members of the Government. To give one example, a half million "script writers" had to be hired, according to one report, to fill in ballots for illiterate voters. It was estimated that the total cost of the election would amount to CNC\$5,000,000,000,000, or about one-half the total of the budget for the current fiscal year as announced last year in the Spring. This outlay would not help the inflationary spiral.

And of course on top of everything else was the civil war. In recent months the military situation has not improved; in fact it has deteriorated further. Liu Po-cheng, the one-eyed Communist general, is almost knocking at the doors of Nanking in establishing a military base in the TaPei Mountains. The fall of the important rail junction of Shihchiachuang has threatened large areas of North China. In all, Communist control at the time of the election had extended over 400 to 600 (estimates vary) of China's 1,997 hsien, or counties, and

about one-fourth of China's population was prevented by the civil war from participating in the election in any way.

Despite these facts, it was decided that the elections should be held, as scheduled. Preparations were hastened. Some provisions of the constitution and the electoral laws were sidestepped, including the requirements that candidates resign their official positions, that rosters of candidates and voters be announced at least thirty days before polling day, and that ballots be printed and counted at a central place. Nominations were held open until just before the election date. The Government postponed its plans for eight to ten million overseas Chinese to vote after strong opposition on the part of the foreign countries involved. It proceeded with plans to hold "absentee elections" among refugees from some areas under Communist control, but elections in eleven provinces and two municipalities under Communist rule were postponed, tentatively and optimistically, until December 21-23. "Practice elections" were held in some of the major cities.

There was very little election campaigning comparable to that in an election in the United States, however. I watched for it in both Shanghai and Nanking. There were a few posters, a few pamphlets, and a few dinners and teas, but little more. Reports from other areas indicated that public campaigning was rare. One candidate in Shanghai made news by making a few public campaign speeches.

By the eve of election day it was claimed by official sources that 150,823,703 voters had been registered and over 30,000 candidates nominated. The Kuomintang ticket included 1,900 names, some of which were not party members, while the Young China Party and the Democratic Socialist Party were reported to have put up a total of 470 candidates. The Kuomintang had agreed to allocate this many seats to the minority parties by requesting its own party organization in certain districts not to propose any candidates. The large majority of candidates were "non-partisans", in theory at least, who had been nominated by 500 or more voters each, but the consensus was that the majority of these were clearly Kuomintang supporters.

Out of these candidates were to be elected 2,298 representatives to the National Assembly. The constitution prescribes that the National Assembly have geographical, vocational, and tribal representation, and a certain percentage of seats are guaranteed to women. The basic geographical district is the hsien. One delegate is allotted to each hsien of less than a half million population, with another for each additional half million population. The remainder of the total of 3,024 seats are allocated as follows: municipalities 56, Tibetan Banners and Leagues 40, Mongols 57, vocational groups (doctors, teachers, lawyers, and so on) 487, women's groups 168, overseas Chinese 65, and "people with special ways of life" (such as Lolo tribesmen) 17. Because of the civil war, obstacles to overseas Chinese voting, and other

reasons, however, only 2,298 representatives were to be elected on November 21-23, but this would constitute a quorum of the Assembly, and the remaining members could be elected at a later date - if possible

The morning of November 21 was clear and cold in Nanking, and the nation's capital was festive with bright flags lining the main avenues and displayed by most of the shops and stores. Chung Shan Road and the other thoroughfares were crowded, as usual, with people in padded clothes or thick overcoats. Peddlers hawked their wares, and buyers haggled on the streets, and stores had opened their doors for normal business. The flags, displayed by Government order, indicated that something special was taking place, and sirens and gongs had announced earlier in the morning that this was a day of particular significance. And the schoolchildren were enjoying a holiday.

Stretched high above some of the streets were lettered banners. A few of them exhorted the people to help carry out air raid defense measures. No one took them very seriously. Some of the other banners carried election publicity. Not everyone took them seriously either, but some people did.

Near the center of Chung Cheng Road, not far from the heart of the city, I stopped a rickshaw coolie and asked him (through an interpreter), "Do you know about the election?" His face was blank. "What election?" Ten yards away I repeated the question to the proprietor of a small shop. "Yes, I know about it", he answered. "What is it all about?" I asked. "We are electing representatives to speak for the people." "When do you vote?" "Day after tomorrow." "Who will you vote for?" "I haven't made up my mind yet!" The people I interrogated covered the range from complete ignorance to reasonable awareness of what it was all about.

Voting procedures varied in different localities in China. In Nanking where I observed the voting myself, voting for delegates of women's organizations took place on the first day; election of vocational group representatives took place on the second day, and the general election of geographical representatives took place on the final day.

One of the 31 polling stations open for women voters in Nanking on November 21 was the Chung Hsing National People's Primary School. Just inside the gate to this school is an open court. Beyond that is a pavilion open in front and rear, while at the back of the court is a building with a wide center door. Under the pavilion four parallel rows of tables were set up for checking the voters' registration cards, and six men sat at these tables with voting lists. As each woman arrived she produced her registration card which was checked with the lists. The woman then made a thumb print on the registration list, and her registration card was stamped. She then proceeded to the building in the rear where her registration card was exchanged for a

red, paper ballot on which were printed three circles indicating where the voter was to write the name of her choice. With her ballot the voter then returned to the pavilion where a list of six women candidates appeared on a large poster. Tables, pens, and ink were provided for the voters' use. The voting place was entirely open. Three "script writers" filled in the ballots for those who could not write. After the ballots were filled in they were taken by the voters themselves to a pinewood ballot box and deposited through one of the two narrow slits in the top. The voting procedure was simple, and by and large it was carried out with little difficulty. Some of the women, particularly the older and the obviously poorer ones, looked bewildered by the whole business, but they were given assistance by officials.

Two aspects of the voting were somewhat strange to a person who has voted in the United States, however. One was the complete lack of any provisions for secrecy and the unconcerned way in which the voters, even those who could write, filled in their ballots in full view of all spectators. I did not see anyone closely observing the filling out of the ballots, but an experienced British correspondent told me later that he had identified Kuomintang secret police who not only watched the voting but kept notes on how votes were cast. In any case anyone who wanted to watch could do so, for the voting was completely open. Another aspect of the voting which caught the attention of foreign observers was the fact that people could vote as proxies for anyone whose registration card they possessed. A ballot was given for each registration card produced, and some voters filled in, or had filled in, as many as six or seven ballots. When questioned they said that these were for members of their families or friends, although there was no easy way for an observer to check their claims.

At 11:00 A.M. on the 21st Chung Hsing School was thrown into complete confusion when Madame Chiang Kai-shek arrived to cast her vote. Looking very glamorous she arrived with her retinue, side-stepped all the usual formalities, filled out her ballot in the midst of a pushing, curious crowd, and departed with a flourish. It took about fifteen minutes for the bedlam to subside, but after the tables and chairs had been pushed back into place the voting continued. There was much less confusion when President Chiang Kai-shek voted two days later. He arrived at the Ta Hsing Kung School at 8:00 A.M., before it had been open for public voting. Twenty-two policemen fanned out around the school entrance. The Generalissimo walked slowly past a troop of boy scouts who shouted "Long Live China" and "Long Live the Generalissimo" in high, excited voices. He was dressed in a black cape, wore a felt hat, carried a large cane, and had a pleased smile on his face. He observed all the rules. His registration card was checked and exchanged for a ballot which he filled out and dropped into the pine box in the presence of about fifty officials, members of the press, and others who had special cards.

By the night of Sunday, November 23, the voting in Nanking was all over but the counting.

All in all there was not much enthusiasm during the three days of voting in Nanking - in spite of the flags, the sirens, and the gongs. The voting places were never very crowded, and it is doubtful if more than a small percentage of those qualified to vote did so. News reports from other parts of China indicated that the same was true elsewhere. From Canton, for example, came reports of "not much enthusiasm", while Shanghai reports claimed that only about one fifth of the local electorate actually voted. In Nanking it appeared that the largest turn-out was on the part of the middle class. A great many intellectuals abstained from voting as a kind of protest against the Kuomintang. "I wouldn't vote in such a set-up election if they paid me", an English-speaking college professor in Nanking said to me, and his feeling was shared evidently by many other non-Kuomintang intellectuals. There was every indication that only a relatively small number of the lower class people voted. This was probably due to a combination of ignorance and apathy. Reports from rural areas seemed to show, however, that peasant voting was quite extensive. The explanation usually given was the fact that the "Pao Chang" (leader of an administrative area called a "Pao") usually saw to it that his people got out and cast their votes.

Complete results of the voting have not yet been announced. All partial reports to-date, however, indicate that as expected the Kuomintang has made pretty much of a clean sweep. There was never any real possibility of it being otherwise. However, I find that I do not agree entirely with those (and there are many) who regard the election performance with complete cynicism and contempt. The very fact that the election was held at all has considerable significance, in my mind, and I believe that the Kuomintang made a real effort, not altogether successful by any means, to encourage popular interest and participation - even though undoubtedly they never even considered the possibility of having to give up their control of the Government as a result of the election. As a leading Shanghai newspaper said in an editorial on November 22, the election "may prove to be the biggest educational step China has taken since the revolution." Whether or not this statement will be justified remains to be seen. Certainly no drastic change in the political situation in China can be expected when the new constitution is made effective on December 25, but it will be interesting to watch for any new developments resulting from that step.

While in Nanking I had long conversations with several Chinese leaders including: Wang Shih-chieh, Minister for Foreign Affairs; Chen Li-fu, Minister of Organization of the Kuomintang Party; Sun Fo, Vice-President of China and President of the Legislative Yuan; and Wong Wen-hao, Director of the National Resources Commission. I can not even begin to outline the various opinions which they expressed to me, but I hope I will be able to

report some of them in later letters. I spent an extremely illuminating afternoon with U.S. Ambassador Stuart who not only clarified in my mind many aspects of the current situation but gave me useful advice on my own program as well. Professor Bates of the University of Nanking gave me advice and guidance on reading and research which I hope to do while in Peiping. I talked with many others who were helpful in giving me information and advice. Two conversations of particular interest were those with Mike Keon, an Australian who has just returned from a seven month stay with the Chinese Communists in Shantung, and with Fred Gruin, a "Time" correspondent who recently returned from a tour of Sinkiang. Professor Buck unfortunately was not in Nanking, and I did not make much progress on plans for my rural project, but I have the names of several men in Peiping who should be able to give me assistance in that regard.

Yesterday I flew from Nanking to Peiping, via Tsingtao, Tsinan, and Tientsin. It was bitterly cold, and I haven't completely thawed out yet. I am temporarily staying at the College of Chinese Studies, 5 Tungssu Toutiao Hutung, and I have made preliminary arrangements for a Chinese tutor. I will write more about that later.

Sincerely yours,

Doak Barnett

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