

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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U.S. Embassy
Nanking, China
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Today is market day in Hsieh Ma Ch'ang, a small village several hours by bus from Chungking. On market days streams of farmers carrying foodstuffs and handicrafts converge on the village from the surrounding countryside, and the narrow stone paths winding their tortuous way through the rice fields are crowded with people walking in single file toward the village. This morning I joined the procession and walked the four "li" from the College of Rural Reconstruction, where I am temporarily staying, to the busy market places of Hsieh Ma Ch'ang. I have begun the process of getting acquainted with one small area of rural China - an area in southern Szechuan, not far from the Kweichow border.

I should describe my program for the next few weeks in this letter, but at the risk of leaving you temporarily up in the air concerning my plans I am going to defer that until my next report. In this letter I will bring you up-to-date on some of my activities since my last report from Tientsin.

On April 10th I finally managed to squeeze my way into a plane crowded with National Assembly delegates en route from North China to Nanking. When I arrived in the capital I found a bed at the home of some young Australian diplomats whom I had known in Peiping and went to work arranging my next move. I stayed in Nanking from April 10th to April 24th. During those two weeks, in addition to interviewing a number of people and being entertained by old and new friends I divided most of my time between (a) arriving at a decision on where I should go to study rural conditions and making the necessary final arrangements, (b) curing a rip-roaring case of infected gums, which I probably contracted in Shansi, by daily medical treatments including sulfa drug injections and a variety of pills and mouth washes, and (c) "covering" the National Assembly by attending its sessions almost every day and talking to Assembly delegates and others about the meetings. It was extremely interesting observing the Assembly in action, and this letter will be confined to observations on the Assembly and some of the events which took place during its sessions.

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"China's First National Assembly" opened in Nanking on March 29th, and its sessions continued throughout the month of April. It

provided a good many surprises for those who expected it to be nothing more than a colorless and meaningless "Kuomintang show" put on to impress naive observers at home and abroad. On the other hand it was disappointing to those who believed it might be able to make a thoroughly democratic beginning toward constitutional government in China.

China's National Assembly probably is one of the largest representative bodies ever to meet in any country. Its theoretical membership is over three thousand, and the actual number of delegates elected since last winter and attending this First Assembly was somewhat over twenty-seven hundred. This huge group was a heterogeneous cross-section of many elements in Chinese society. It was representative primarily of upper and middle class groups, but many occupations, vocations, and professions, as well as cultural minority groups, were included. The Assembly Hall, crowded with delegates from all parts of China, presented a colorful spectacle. Twelve big klieg lights focused on the auditorium stage, at the rear of which was hung a tremendous oil portrait of Sun Yat-sen framed by an even larger national flag. A portrait of Chiang K'ai-shek hung on the edge of the auditorium balcony, and colorful flags were draped throughout the hall. Surrounded by these ubiquitous symbols of Republican China, the delegates included Uighurs from Sinkiang wearing embroidered Moslem skull caps and high leather boots, Mongols in long native gowns with sash belts, and Tibetans in Lama robes. Many of these border region representatives could not understand the official "kuo yü" (Mandarin), the national language used in all the meetings, and had to ask companions for whispered translations. Even some of the "Han Chinese" had difficulty understanding the heavy provincial or local accents of a few delegates. The language problem was not a major one, however, since "kuo yü" is now almost universally known among literate Chinese, but in view of their varying backgrounds the delegates certainly did not all "speak the same language" in terms of semantic content. Scholarly old men with magnificent white beards, modern businessmen in well-cut foreign clothes, beautiful young women, political bosses and party hacks, well-known modern intellectuals, earnest young men in "Sun Yat-sen uniforms", and plump old women were jammed together in a strange social conglomeration. The roster included some of China's best-known leaders including cabinet ministers, semi-independent warlords, and a few famous generals. One illiterate farmer delegate looked as if he had come directly from Spring plowing. The oldest delegate was eighty-six, the youngest twenty-three. Two delegates were blind. The glamor girl of the Assembly was a beautiful Manchu descendent of the Imperial family who was given the unofficial title of "Miss Assembly" and was greeted with whistling and cheering whenever she appeared on the stage. Although there were a few uniforms scattered throughout the hall, the group was overwhelmingly civilian.

The convocation of this colorful and impressive group did not arouse much nation-wide enthusiasm or interest. I was in Peiping and Tientsin during the first few days of the Assembly meetings and in Chungking during the closing days, and in none of these cities did I discover more than casual interest in the Assembly sessions in progress in the nation's capital. Fortunately, though, this lack of interest

did not extend to the Assembly hall itself. A great many delegates there took themselves, their responsibilities, and their opportunities seriously, and the sessions were very much alive and often tense. However, the earnestness and good intentions of the majority of the delegates were constantly confronted with the double obstacle of apathy outside the Assembly and intervention by the well-organized Kuomintang party machine within the Assembly.

For a group of such unwieldy size the Assembly was extremely well-organized and run. Preparations for its meetings began in the Fall of last year, even before the election of delegates in early December. On November 21st the Government appointed a Preparatory Committee, with Sun Fo as Chairman, to handle the problems of drawing up preliminary plans for organization and procedures and arranging for housing, food, and transportation for the multitude of delegates. When the opening date of the Assembly was postponed from December 25th to March 29th, this committee was given ample time to prepare for the meetings. As a result, the delegates were well taken care of when they reached Nanking, and the Assembly was run with an organizational efficiency which was impressive. A fleet of shiny buses was assigned to transport the delegates, hotels and public buildings were procured as Assembly hostels, and arrangements were made with local restaurants to serve the delegates on a meal ticket basis. At the Assembly Hall itself, seating and other requirements were carefully prearranged, special gendarmes were assigned to the task of controlling traffic and guarding the auditorium, information services were established, provisions were made to print and distribute copies of all Assembly proceedings, tea rooms and rest rooms were set up, and special facilities of all sorts made the hall an efficient, modern establishment.

The meetings themselves were run with scrupulous fairness and diligent regard for accepted democratic, parliamentary procedures. Delegates who wanted to speak had their say. Voting facilities were arranged so that complete secrecy of balloting was possible and stuffing of the ballot boxes was inconceivable. The Presidium, or Steering Committee, which was elected by the Assembly, rotated the Chairman's position among its members, and no favoritism was shown to any person or group in Assembly proceedings.

Freedom of speech was exercised with gusto. This was one of the most interesting and encouraging aspects of the sessions. It surprised many people and distressed others when the self-assertiveness and independence of the delegates gathered momentum during the course of the Assembly meetings, and before it was over the Assembly had become a sort of open forum on national affairs and a sounding board for public opinion. Once inhibitions had been destroyed, all sorts of discontent was publicly aired, and criticism of the Government was quite open. The give and take within the Assembly sometimes almost led to pandemonium. The lack of dignity at such times would have been discouraging in a long-established representative body with firm traditions of democratic action, but in these meetings, on the contrary, it was an encouraging sign of the eagerness with which many delegates

insisted upon exercising freedom of speech even at the expense of decorum. The near-riots, when groups of delegates arose and shouted heatedly at each other across the Assembly Hall, brought smouldering discontent and differences of opinion into the open. The dominant position of the incumbent top party and government leaders was never directly attacked, but many current problems and issues were raised and debated.

The free expression of opinion within the Assembly did not mean, however, that it was basically a democratic body, representative of its constituency of over four hundred million people and free from outside interference and control. This was far from being the case. In the first place, the election of delegates last Winter encountered innumerable difficulties and obstacles, many of them inherent in the present general state of affairs in China, which prevented the election from being a complete expression of popular will in the sense that democratic elections theoretically should be. Under existing conditions in China today, however, that was inevitable, even when good intentions were present. The Assembly was overwhelmingly Kuomintang in its composition, and minority groups were admitted on sufferance as a matter of Kuomintang policy - perhaps on the basis of a sincere desire to broaden the base of the Government, perhaps to impress Chinese and foreign observers, or perhaps as a result of mixed motives including both of these and others as well. The inevitable one-party character of the Assembly was no more than could be expected. An unexpected development took place before and during the Assembly sessions, however, in the form of a dispute over Assembly seats. The "solution" of this dispute cast a shadow over the meetings and threatened to make them a travesty on "the beginning of constitutional democracy in China".

The origin of this dispute was a pre-election political deal made between the top Kuomintang executives and the leaders of the Young China Party and the Democratic Socialist Party, the two minority parties which had agreed to support the new constitution. The Kuomintang, anxious to have these small parties cooperate to give the Government at least the semblance of having a multi-party character under the new constitution, agreed to allot a certain number of seats to them by not proposing or backing Kuomintang candidates in certain districts. In this way, it was believed, a Coalition Government of sorts could be ensured. The plan back-fired, however. In the districts involved many Kuomintang members ran for election without party sanction and on the basis of their own personal political resources and backing were successful in defeating minor party candidates. The number of minor party members elected, as a consequence, was far below the number promised in the pre-election agreement, and serious inter-party and intra-party rifts developed. The minor parties complained bitterly, asserting that they had been double-crossed and that the whole thing had been "purposely engineered". They threatened to boycott the Assembly. This presented the Kuomintang party leaders with a dilemma. They could either support the election results and see their coalition crumble or attempt to oust their own party members who had been legitimately elected to the seats in question. They chose the latter alternative. Over four hundred Kuomintang

"independents" were involved. At first the party requested these men to withdraw voluntarily and allow the minor party candidates to take over their seats. A few complied, but the majority adamantly refused. Then all the power and methods of exerting pressure available to the party were directed against the "rebels" to make them withdraw. They were threatened with expulsion from the party, and party leaders from Chiang on down alternately pleaded with them and thundered at them. A few more withdrew, but many were still firm in refusing to give up their "mandate from the people". Ten of the group went on a hunger strike, and a sit-down strike in the Assembly Hall on the night of March 28th threatened to disrupt the opening session until the "rebels" were forcibly removed a few hours before the meeting. When all methods of pressure failed to force the hold-outs to "voluntarily" give up their seats, the top Kuomintang officials saw to it that a group of these "rebels" was refused certification as members of the Assembly. In this way the coalition was preserved, and the Assembly opened as scheduled - but without a considerable number of delegates who had been legitimately elected.

This "solution" of the dispute over seats was a serious blow to the Assembly. The accomplishments of the Assembly as a democratic body were in spite of and not because of the way in which the dispute was solved.

The dispute was, however, a significant indication that the Kuomintang party machine is not the all-powerful, omnipotent, and monolithic political organization that it is sometimes assumed to be. Although the decision of the top party leaders did finally "solve" the dispute by illegal fiat, the dispute showed that the party did not have absolute control over either the elections or the party membership. The fissions within the party were to be dramatically high-lighted again toward the end of the Assembly sessions during the election of the Vice-President of China.

The first few meetings of the Assembly were devoted to preliminary organization. Things moved rather slowly at the beginning. There was considerable wrangling over procedural and organizational matters of minor importance. However, after a major dispute over the size of the Assembly Presidium was resolved by increasing the Presidium's membership from twenty-five to eighty-five so that all important groups within the Assembly could be represented on it, the Presidium and Assembly officers were finally elected, and the first regular plenary session got under way on April 6th.

The functions of the National Assembly as outlined in the new Chinese constitution are very limited. It is not a legislative body; all legislative functions are assigned to the Legislative Yuan. The constitution states that the Assembly is to meet once every six years (except for extraordinary sessions) and has the right and duty to carry out four specific powers: the election of the President and the Vice-President of China, the recall of these two executive officers if they should be removed, amendment of the constitution, and ratification of constitutional amendments proposed by the Legislative Yuan. In short,

according to the constitution the Assembly is normally nothing more than an electoral college.

It soon became apparent, however, that the delegates did not believe their functions should be so rigidly limited. From April 6th to April 8th, during discussion of the Assembly rules of procedure, there was heated debate which finally resulted in the deletion of Article 17 of the rules, which stated that the scope of discussions within the Assembly had to be limited to the four powers enumerated in Article 27 of the constitution, and the insertion of a new article permitting the Assembly to request and hear administrative reports from Government officials, make interpolations, formulate proposals, and discuss all important national affairs before electing the nation's top executives. During the next few days there was feverish activity in the various Government ministries by ministers who foresaw the possibility of being called to make a public accounting of their activities.

Chiang Kai-shek made the first report to the Assembly on April 9th. He expressed complete faith in the Government's ability to defeat the Communists. "Nationalist China will not collapse in six months, in six years, or even sixty years", he said, and he blamed the fear of collapse on Communist propaganda and the predictions of foreign newspapermen and observers. But his account of the state of the nation was an amazing report. The gist of it was that "everything is fine and dandy". It contained more than a little sophistry. He claimed that China's currency, which continues to lose value at a rapid rate, has better backing than before the war. He listed all the assets in bullion in the Central Bank's vaults, in foreign exchange held abroad, and in industrial and commercial assets owned by the Government, but he failed to point out that none of these assets are available to provide convertible backing for the paper money coming off of the printing presses every day. Chiang also claimed that the military situation is not serious. He announced a new policy and strategy of concentrating military forces instead of spreading them too thinly, as explanation of recent Government withdrawals from several key points, and he predicted that the Communists would be cleared from all areas south of the Yellow River within the next six months.

When a Honan delegate on the following day criticized Chiang's report as "inadequate" there was an uproar in the Assembly, but after it had calmed down the delegates decided to call in important ministers to make further reports. General Pai Chung-hsi, Minister of National Defense, was first, and he was followed in the next few days by O.K. Yui, Minister of Finance, Ch'en Chi-t'ien, Minister of Economic Affairs, Yu Ta-wei, Minister of Communications, and Yu Fei-ping, Minister of Food. The ministers were questioned from the floor, and many economic and military questions were debated by the Assembly delegates.

The most serious discussions in the Assembly were not on the floor, however, but were in committee rooms. Seven committees were established to consider problems and make proposals under the following headings:

- (1) Constitutional Amendments, (2) National Defense, (3) Foreign

Affairs, (4) Education and Culture, (5) Economics, (6) Social Security, and (7) Border Regions. The organization of these committees was somewhat unusual, for each Assembly delegate could choose the one in which he wished to participate. The Committee on Constitutional Amendments was the largest one (587 members) because the issue of amendments was one which aroused a great deal of interest. The Committee on Foreign Affairs was the smallest (45 members), but it was one of the most vocal despite its size. All of the committee meetings were open and followed accepted parliamentary procedures.

The issue of constitutional amendment was thoroughly debated. Although some delegates felt that the constitution should be given a chance to work before any changes were considered, there was considerable sentiment in favor of making a few changes immediately. Article 27 on the powers of the National Assembly, Article 57 on the relationship between the Executive and Legislative Yuan, and Article 63 on the powers of the Legislative Yuan might have been amended if strong appeals from above had not discouraged it. Chiang and others appealed vigorously to the delegates to let the constitution stand. Possibly this was because the minority groups and parties for various reasons were opposed to any changes, and the problem of holding the coalition together was involved. In any case, the question of constitutional amendment was temporarily dropped.

The net result of the work in the committees was a mass of resolutions and recommendations numbering in the hundreds. Because of the rush of time these were passed by the plenary Assembly in a perfunctory manner, in some cases without even a complete reading of the text, and even after being passed they had no binding force on the Government. Nonetheless, they had some significance as expressions of popular sentiment. One resolution called for the immediate liquidation of "wealthy families" and instructed the Government to draw up specific measures within three months. Another called for an appeal to the United Nations if Russia continues to refuse to fulfill her obligations under the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1945. The Government was prodded on a number of sore points.

On April 18th the Assembly voted to grant the President extraordinary emergency powers for the duration of the Communist suppression campaign. The validity of these "temporary constitutional provisions" is not altogether clear, but they were accepted without question, and they were natural and logical in view of the seriousness of the civil war situation. These measures give the President the power to act independently in emergency situations, but such acts may be modified or abrogated later by the Legislative Yuan, and either the Legislative Yuan or the President himself may terminate the period of these emergency powers. (There was also an additional clause calling for the convening of the next National Assembly session before December 25th, 1950, for discussion of amendments to the constitution.) On the next day, April 19th, Chiang K'ai-shek was elected President of China.

Soon after the Assembly opened Chiang had shocked the Assembly and the Kuomintang by announcing, without forewarning, to an extraordinary session of the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang (which had met to select a candidate for the presidency) that he would not run for the job. The effect of this declaration was to mobilize universal support for him among all groups in the Assembly and to virtually eliminate any possibility of opposition. This may have been his deliberate intention in making the statement. In any case, the way in which he was elected makes his position that of an "indispensable man" who was "drafted" for the job. Chu Cheng, a Kuomintang veteran who is President of the Judicial Yuan, also ran - to make it a race. His showing was nothing more than a token opposition, however, and the 2430 to 269 vote was generally interpreted as a clear confirmation of Chiang's paramount position of personal leadership and prestige in Nationalist China. There is no one else at present who can compete for the number one position.

The results of the presidential election were really a foregone conclusion, but the vice-presidential election was a real political struggle which was both tense and exciting and brought the Assembly to a dramatic climax. All important national political cliques and groups mobilized their forces and threw their weight one way or another. Because the struggle was concentrated in time and space, and because its progress was shown in recorded votes, it was an unusual opportunity for an outside observer to see the internal factions in the Kuomintang at work with or against each other.

After some debate both in and out of the Assembly on the question of nominations, the Kuomintang decided not to make a party nomination as such. As a result, several Kuomintang members ran. Altogether there were six candidates nominated in the Assembly by petition. The line-up was as follows:

Sun Fo - a non-military Kuomintang member from Kwangtung. He is the son of Sun Yat-sen and enjoys considerable prestige as the "son of the Founder of the Chinese Republic". He has been President of the Legislative Yuan since 1933. Normally he is one of the lone wolves of Kuomintang party politics and operates on the basis of his own friends, connections, and prestige. Formerly he was considered to be a liberal, but at present he is considered to be simply a political opportunist by many people. His original support came from the Kwangtung delegates and overseas Chinese, but then he received the backing of the powerful Kuomintang party machine (controlled by the so-called "CC Clique" with Chen Li-fu as party Minister of Organization), reputedly because of the desire of the "CC Clique" to capture the presidency of the Legislative Yuan and the necessity of giving Sun Fo another job in exchange. Sun Fo was the pre-election "best guess" of most informed observers because of his backing by the machine.

Yu Yu-jen - a venerable non-military Kuomintang member from Shensi. Yu is a white-bearded scholar and a noted calligrapher who is President of the Control Yuan. He also was reported to have the backing of the "CC Clique". This was said to be a maneuver by which they hoped to take away northern votes from Li Tsung-jen.

Li Tsung-jen - a military Kuomintang member from Kwangsi. Li is well-known for an excellent military career which included the 1938 Taierschwang victory over the Japanese and administrative career as joint leader (with General Pai Chung-hsi, now Minister of National Defense) in a progressive, semi-autonomous regime in Kwangsi. He has been the head of the President's Peiping Headquarters for the past two years. His backing included Kwangsi delegates, the Chinese Moslems of the Northwest and some other minority groups (through his friend and supporter Pai Chung-hsi who is the outstanding Moslem in the Central Government and at times is a sort of spokesman for minority groups), and many northern friends acquired during his tour of duty in Peiping. He is considered, despite his military background to be a liberal and progressive leader, relatively speaking at least, and in the weeks just before the Assembly met he became a rallying point for liberal elements within the Kuomintang including an important group of Peiping professors. His relations with Chiang, although good in recent years, are somewhat uncertain in view of the fact that Li and Pai were in open revolt against Nanking in the early 1930's. His election was actively opposed by the Kuomintang party machine.

Hsu Fu-lin - a non-military Democratic Socialist Party member, serving as party leader during the absence of Carson Ch'ang. Hsu was prominent in the old Peking Government and for some year has been a State Counsellor. He is a native of Kwangtung and received the support of some southern delegates in addition to the solid support of his own small party.

Ch'eng Ch'ien - a military Kuomintang member with a long but not too well-known party history. He is head of the President's Headquarters in Hankow. His backing included personal party and military friends as well as many delegates from Central China.

Moh Teh-hui - a non-military non-partisan from Manchuria. Formerly Moh was a sort of go-between liaison between the semi-autonomous Manchurian leader Chang Hsueh-liang and the Central Government. His support consisted mainly of Northerners.

The campaigning of these candidates was extensive and included dinners, teas, campaign speeches, posters, pictures, leaflets, sound trucks, and back-room deals. Sun Fo was most lavish in entertaining. Yu Yu-jen concentrated his efforts on inscribing personal scrolls and distributing them to delegates. Li Tsung-jen, aided by his vivacious wife and conscientious supporters, talked with hundreds of people and on the morning of the first balloting appeared on the steps of the Assembly Hall and shook the hands of almost all the delegates as they entered the building.

The voting and tabulation of results, which began on April 23rd, was slow and laborious, but it was dramatic. After the ballot boxes were opened under the glare of klieg lights the name on each ballot cast was announced, and the ballot was held up for all to see. The results right from the beginning were surprising. Li was leading, while Yu Yu-jen made a very poor showing and Ch'ien Ch'ien made an very good showing which was difficult for outside observers to explain. Li received 754 votes. Next were Sun Fo with 559 and Ch'eng Ch'ien

with 552. Yu Yu-jen (493), Moh Teh-hui (218), and Hsu Fu-lin (214) were eliminated according to the election procedure. The election rules stated that if no candidate received an absolute majority of the total theoretical vote of the Assembly only the top three candidates would be included on the next balloting. If no candidate received an absolute majority by the end of the third balloting, only the top two candidates would be included on the fourth balloting, and the one receiving the most votes would be elected.

Tension mounted as the election progressed, particularly after the Kwangtung delegation on the morning of the 23rd left the Assembly Hall immediately after voting and proceeded en masse to smash the office and the printing shop of the National Salvation Daily which had printed attacks on Sun Fo. The second balloting, however, showed no change in the position of the leaders. Li received 1163 votes, Sun 945, and Ch'eng 616. Frantic last-minute political maneuvering took place.

Then on April 25th an electrifying thing happened which threw the whole Assembly into confusion. Ch'eng Ch'ien withdrew from the race, conceding defeat. Then Li withdrew, asserting that unfair methods were being used to intimidate delegates to prevent them from voting for him. Just to make things complete Sun Fo also withdrew. It was only after pleading by the top Kuomintang officials, by the Presidium of the Assembly, and by public leaders that Li Tsung-jen and the other candidates consented to re-enter the race. In the third balloting on April 28th Li received 1156 votes, Sun 1040, and Ch'eng 515. Then, on April 29th, Li Tsung-jen was elected Vice-President by a vote of 1438 to Sun Fo's 1295.

The election of the Vice-President assumed an importance all out of proportion with the intrinsic importance of the job, which in itself is relatively minor unless the President dies. It became an important political struggle in which rivalries within the Kuomintang came out into the open in a battle of ballots. The election of General Li Tsung-jen was a defeat for the party machine and a victory for opposition forces within the party. The grouping of relatively liberal elements around Li, although not altogether logical in view of Li's military background, may be significant for the future. Li is reported to be willing to listen to the advice of the professors and similar people who have assisted him. When the Government administration is reorganized in the near future a number of important changes are expected, and Li may be in a position to act as a spokesman for certain opposition elements in the party in influencing the selection of personnel and the determination of policy. This will not necessarily be the case, however, because the relations between Vice-President Li and President Chiang may be strained. It was reliably reported during the election that Chiang personally ordered Li not to run, and Li did so in defiance of his chief. In any case, Li will be a man to watch in the future.

Sincerely yours,

Doak Barnett
Doak Barnett