Federalism in China

THE newcomer in China in observing and judging events usually makes the mistake of attaching too much significance to current happenings. Occurrences take place which in the western world would portend important changes—and nothing important results. It is not easy to loosen the habit of years; and so the visitor assumes that an event which is striking to the point of sensationalism must surely be part of a train of events having a definite trend; some deep-laid plan must be behind it. It takes a degree of intellectual patience added to time and experience to make one realize that even when there is a rhythm in events the tempo is so retarded that one must wait a long time to judge what is really going on. Most political events are like daily changes in the weather, fluctuations back and forth which may seriously affect individuals but which taken one by one tell little about the movement of the seasons. Even the occurrences which are due to human intention are usually sporadic and casual, and the observer errs by reading into them too much plot, too comprehensive a scheme, too far-sighted a plan. The aim behind the event is likely to be only some immediate advantage, some direct increase of power, the overthrow of a rival, the grasping at greater wealth by an isolated act, without any consecutive or systematic looking ahead.

Foreigners are not the only ones who have erred, however, in judging the Chinese political situation of the last few years. Beginning two years ago, one heard experienced Chinese with political affiliations saying that it was impossible for things to go on as they were for more than three months longer. Some decisive change must occur. Yet outwardly the situation has remained much the same not only for three months but for two years, the exception being the overthrow of the Anfu faction a year ago. And this occurrence hardly marked a definite turn in events, as it was, to a considerable extent, only a shifting of power from the hands of one set of tuchuns to another set. Nevertheless at the risk of becoming a victim of the fallacy which I have been setting forth, I will hazard the remark that the last few months *have* revealed a definite and enduring trend—that through the diurnal fluctuations of the strife for personal power and wealth a seasonal political change in society is now showing itself. Certain lines of cleavage seem to show themselves, so that through the welter of striking, picturesque, sensational but meaningless events, a definite pattern is revealed.

This pattern is indicated by the title of this article—a movement toward the development of a federal form of government. In calling the movement one toward federalism, there is, however, more of a jump into the remote future than circumstances justify. It would be more accurate, as well as more modest, to say that there is a well defined and seemingly permanent trend toward provincial autonomy and local self-government accompanied by a hope and a vague plan that in the future the more or less independent units will recombine into the United or Federated States of China. Some who look far into the future anticipate three stages; the first being the completion of the present secessionist movement; the second the formation of northern and southern confederations respectively; the third a reunion into a single state.

To go into the detailed evidence for the existence of a definite and lasting movement of this sort would presume too much on the reader's knowledge of Chinese geography and his acquaintance with specific recent events. I shall confine myself to quite general features of the situation. The first feature is the new phase which has been assumed by the long historic antagonism of the north and the south. Roughly speaking, the revolution which established the republic and overthrew the Manchus represented a victory for the south. But the transformation during the last five years of the nominal republic into a corrupt oligarchy of satraps or military governors or feudal lords has represented a victory for the north. It is a significant fact, symbolically at least, that the most powerful remaining tuchun or military governor in China—in some respects the only powerful one who has survived the vicissitudes of the last few years—namely Chang Tso Lin, is the uncrowned king of the three Manchurian provinces. The so-called civil war of the north and south is not, however, to be understood as a conflict of republicanism located in the south and militarism in the north. Such a notion is directly contrary to facts. The "civil war" till six or eight months ago was mainly a conflict of military governors and factions, part of that struggle for personal power and wealth which has been going on all over China.

But recently events have taken a different course. In four of the southern provinces, tuchuns who seemed all powerful have toppled over, and the provinces have proclaimed or tacitly assumed their independence of both the Peking and the former military Canton governments—the province in which Canton is situated being one of the four. I happened to be in Hunan, the first of the southerly provinces to get comparative independence, last fall, not long after the overthrow of the vicious despot who had ruled the province with the aid of northern troops. For a week a series of meetings were held in Changsha, the capital of the province. The burden of every speech was "Hunan for the Hunanese." The slogan embodies the spirit of two powers each aiming at becoming the central authority; it is a conflict of the principle of provincial autonomy, represented by the politically more mature south, with that of militaristic centralization, represented by Peking.

As I write, in early September, the immediate issue is obscured by the fight which Wu Pei Fu is waging with the Hunanese who with nominal independence are in aim and interest allied with the south. If, as is likely, Wu Pei Fu wins, he may take one of two courses. He may use his added power to turn against Chang Tso Lin and the northern militarists which will bring him into virtual alliance with the southerners and establish him as the antagonist of the federal principle. This is the course which his earlier record would call for. Or he may yield to the usual official lust for power and money and try once more the Yuan Shi Kai policy of military centralization with himself as head, after trying out conclusions with Chang Tso Lin as his rival. This is the course which the past record of military leaders indicates. But even if Wu Pei Fu follows precedent and goes bad, he will only hasten his own final end. This is not prophecy. It is only a statement of what has uniformly happened in China just at the moment a military leader seemed to have complete power in his grasp. In other words, a victory for Wu Pei Fu may either accelerate or may retard the development of provincial autonomy according to the course he pursues. It cannot permanently prevent or deflect it.

The basic factor that makes one sure that this trend toward local autonomy is a reality and not merely one of those meaningless shiftings of power which confuse the observer, is that it is in accord with Chinese temperament, tradition and circumstance. Feudalism is past and gone two thousand years ago, and at no period since has China possessed a working centralized government. The absolute empires which have come and gone in the last two millenniums existed by virtue of non-interference and a religious aura. The latter can never be restored; and every episode of the republic demonstrates that China with its vast and diversified territories, its population of between three hundred and fifty and four hundred million, its multitude of languages and lack of communications, its enormous local attachments sanctified by the family system and ancestral worship, cannot be managed from a single and remote centre. China rests upon a network of local and voluntary associations cemented by custom. This fact has given it its unparallelled stability and its power to progress even under the disturbed political conditions of the past ten years. I sometimes think that Americans with their own traditional contempt for politics and their spontaneous reliance upon self-help and local organization are the only ones who are naturally fitted to understand China's course. The Japanese with their ingrained reliance upon the state have continually misjudged and misacted. The British understand better than we do the significance of local self-government; but they are misled by their reverence for politics so that they cannot readily find or see government when it does not take political form.

It is not too much to say that one great cause for the overthrow of the Manchus was the fact that because of the pressure of international relations they attempted to force, especially in fiscal matters, a centralization upon the provinces wholly foreign to the spirit of the people. This created hostility where before there had been indifference. China may possibly not emerge from her troubles a unified nation, any more than a much smaller and less populous Europe emerged from the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire, a single state. Indeed one often wonders, not that China is divided, but that she is not much more broken up than she is. But one thing is certain. Whatever progress China finally succeeds in making will come from a variety of local centres, not from Peking or Canton. It will be effected by means of associations and organizations which even though they assume a political form are not primarily political in nature.

Criticisms are passed, especially by foreigners, upon the present trend of events. The criticisms are more than plausible. It is evident that the present weakness of China is due to her divided condition. Hence it is natural to argue that the present movement being one of secession and general disintegration will increase the weakness of the country. It is also evident that many of

China's troubles are due to the absence of any efficient administrative system; it is reasonable to argue that China cannot get even railways and universal education without a strong and stable central government. There is no doubt about the facts. It is not surprising that many friends of China deeply deplore the present tendency while some regard it as the final accomplishment of the long predicted breakup of China. But remedies for China's ills based upon ignoring history, psychology and actual conditions are so utopian that it is not worth while to argue whether or not they are theoretically desirable. The remedy of China's troubles by a strong, centralized government is on a par with curing disease by the expulsion of a devil. The evil is real, but since it is real it cannot be dealt with by trying a method which implies its non-existence. If the devil is really there, he will not be exorcized by a formula. If the trouble is internal, not due to an external demon, the disease can be cured only by using the factors of health and vigor which the patient already possesses. And in China while these factors of recuperation and growth are numerous, they all exist in connection with local organizations and voluntary associations. The increasing volume of the cry that the "tuchuns must go" comes from the provincial and local interests which have been insulted and violated by a nominally centralized but actually chaotic situation. After this negative work is completed, the constructive rebuilding of China can proceed only by utilizing local interests and abilities. In China the movement will be the opposite of that which occurred in Japan. It will be from the periphery to the centre.

Another objection to the present tendency has force especially from the foreign standpoint. As already stated, the efforts of the Manchu dynasty in its latter days to enhance central power were due to international pressure. Foreign nations treated Peking as if it were a capital like London, Paris or Berlin, and in its efforts to meet foreign demands it had to try to become such a centre. The result was disaster. But foreign nations still want to have a single centre which may be held responsible. And subconsciously, if not consciously, this desire is responsible for much of the objection of foreign nationals to the local autonomy movement. They well know that it is going to take a long time to realize the ideal of federation, and meantime where and what is to be the agency responsible for diplomatic relations, the enforcing of indemnities and the securing of concessions?

In one respect the secessionist tendency is dangerous to China herself as well as inconvenient to the powers. It will readily stimulate the desire and ability of foreign nations to interfere in China's domestic affairs. There will be many centres at which to carry on intrigues and from which to get concessions instead of one or two. There is also danger that one foreign nation may line up with one group of provinces, and another foreign nation with another group, so that international friction will increase. Even now some Japanese sources and even such an independent liberal paper as Robert Young's Japan Chronicle are starting or reporting the rumor that the Cantonese experiment is supported by subsidies supplied by American capitalists in the hope of economic concessions. The rumor was invented for a sinister purpose and is persisted in through jealousy. But it illustrates the sort of situation that may come into existence if there are several political centres in China, and one foreign nation backs one and another nation, another.

The danger is real enough. But it cannot be dealt with by attempting the impossible—namely checking the movement toward local autonomy, even though disintegration may temporarily accompany it. The danger only emphasizes the fundamental fact of the whole Chinese situation; that its essence is time. The evils and troubles of China are real enough, and there is no blinking the fact that they are largely of her own making, due to corruption, inefficiency and absence of popular education. But no one who knows the common people doubts that they will win through if they are given time. And in the concrete this means that they be left alone to work out their own destiny. There will doubtless be proposals at the Pacific Conference to place China under some kind of international tutelage. This article and the events connected with the tendency which it reports will be cited as showing this need. Some of the schemes will spring from motives that are hostile to China. Some will be benevolently conceived in a desire to save China from herself and shorten her period of chaos and confusion. But the hope of the world's peace, as well as of China's freedom, lies in adhering to a policy of Hands Off. Give China a chance. Give her time. The danger lies in being in a hurry, in impatience, possibly in the desire of America to show that we are a power in international affairs and that we too have a positive foreign policy. And a benevolent policy of supporting China from without, instead of promoting her aspirations from within, may in the end do China about as much harm as a policy conceived in malevolence.

JOHN DEWEY.

A Certain Rich Man

DANIEL WEBSTER played a sorry trick on all Secretaries of the Treasury. He had to make a speech in 1831 about Alexander Hamilton. In the accepted phrase, he spoke in part as follows:

"Hamilton smote the rock of the national resources, and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth. He touched the dead corpse of the public credit and it sprang upon its feet."

The fat was in the fire. Webster was a man of authority and the report of what he said got about. It got into McGuffey's Fifth Reader and Hill's Rhetoric and the book from which we used to take our pieces to speak on Friday afternoons. In my book it was on the page after the piece that John Spear used to speak that begins:

By Nebo's lonely mountain
On this side Jordan's wave
In a vale in the land of Moab—

But the picture of Alexander Hamilton smiting the rock of the national resources and torrents of revenue gushing forth is one that I have carried in my mind since I was thirteen years old. It interested me. I remembered it. And I am not the only one. That is what made the trouble.

It seemed so easy. From that day to this there have been associations, individuals, corporations, partnerships, societies, clubs, what not, all animated with the single resolve of inducing the Secretary of the Treasury to smite the rock of the public resources while they stood by with pails to catch the abundant streams of revenue that gushed forth. "Look," they have cried, "see what Hamilton did. Why can't you be a great secretary such as he was? Be a patriot and give the rock a good crack for us." Some of these men are in Congress, others are merely citizens on foot and taxpayers. They appear to have only the vaguest idea of where the money comes from; there is plenty in the Treasury.

At this juncture it is given to Mr. Andrew W. Mellon, of Pittsburgh, Pa., to explain to all these persons who have been led astray by Daniel Webster, that money does not grow on trees. Francis Hackett has a new story about two Irishmen:

"What's Michael doing now?" one Irishman asked another at a wayside inn.

"Sure, he's gone to work for the Irish Agricultural Organization Society."

"Go to God! What does the like of him know about agriculture?"

"Well, he's after picking up this job with the Beekeepers' Association. I think that's what he called it."

"And what is he doing with them, the poor fellow?"

"Sure, he's going up and down Ireland with a stallion bee."

Ever since he came to the Treasury Mr. Mellon has been explaining to Congress, to the bankers, and to the public that the government has no stallion dollar; that it doesn't breed money; that it has no way of getting money except by taking it from the earnings of those of us who have gainful occupations. Mr. Mellon may have a stallion dollar or two working for him somewhere, for he is fabulously rich. He knows about money. He respects it. He doesn't like to see it chucked about. He hadn't been in the Treasury a week before he was writing like this in a circular letter to bankers: ". . . the situation calls for the utmost economy. The Nation cannot afford extravagance. . . . The people generally must become more interested in saving the Government's money than in spending it. . . ."

At the end of April he was writing to the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the House: "The Nation cannot continue to spend at this shocking rate. . . . The burden is unbearable. This is no time for extravagance or for entering upon new fields of expenditure. The Nation cannot afford wasteful or reckless expenditure. . . . Expenditures should not even be permitted to continue at the present rate." Mr. Mellon was very much in earnest, and when he talks about money it behooves all and sundry to stop, look and listen, for money is his specialty. He has spent his whole life in amassing and multiplying and guarding it. He is supposed to be runner-up to John D. in the Open Money-Getting Championship, but of that I know nothing. I am asking you to consider him with me now in his new and public aspect as Secretary of the Treasury, and to regard his fabulous wealth only as a background.

It may very well turn out that Mr. Mellon will have the largest opportunity and the most onerous and responsible public service of any of the men Mr. Harding invited to Washington to share under his direction in the conduct of national affairs. For the next half dozen years, and

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