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The Theoretical System of Sun Yat-Sen

By TI-TSUN LI

(Continued from last issue)

III.

From his theory of Social Interpretation of History Dr. Sun drew important conclusions. Indeed, the whole of his "Three Principles"—the main body of his theoretical structure—may truly be regarded as logical deductions from this philosophy of history of his.

From the Sunyatsenian standpoint, history is, as we have seen, a record of human endeavors in overcoming the obstacles to human existence. Anything, be it natural force or human obstruction, that stands between man and a secure and full life will not be tolerated and efforts will be exerted for its elimination. The will to live is the prime mover of history, and only in proportion as life is made more secure and enjoyable does history register a distinct advance. Man himself and not inanimate material forces is the beginning and end of social movements. This is a dominant note in Dr. Sun's thought. His "Three Principles" all begin with the word *Min*, or man or people. In fact, Mr. Hu Han-min, one of Dr. Sun's closest associates and an able writer, had suggested that Sunyatsenism might be very properly termed *Wei Min Chu I* or the "All-People Doctrine."¹⁰

But, as Mr. Hu continued to point out, by "people" Dr. Sun did not mean individual men, but human beings in collectivity. In other words, Dr. Sun was a

good collectivist and not an individualist.¹¹ He blamed the prevailing individualistic outlook of men for all contemporary social and international inequalities. To construct a new world out of the old, collectivism must replace individualism as the guiding philosophy of life. The interest of society at any given time must mean the best interest of the greatest majority at that time. The size of that majority is constantly changing and it grows larger with every progress of society. Whenever the social interest of the majority is obstructed by a minority and anti-social interest, such as the interests of an autocracy or of a plutocracy, society is in a pathological state; the conditions of life of the majority are not as they should be; a struggle takes place, resulting in the elimination of the obstructive minority. Yet it is clear that cooperation and harmony of interest and not conflict, are the normal rule of life.

In primitive times, the problem of existence is a problem of protection and sustenance. "In order to exist," said Dr. Sun, "mankind must have protection and sustenance and it is daily engaged in meeting these two great needs. Protection means self-defense. . . . Sustenance means seeking food. Self-defense and food-seeking are, then, the two chief means by which mankind maintains its existence."¹² The forces that threaten human existence in this early period are

¹⁰ Hu Han-min, "Theory of The Kuomintang Mass Movement," *Chung Yang Bi-Monthly*, No. 1, (Nanking, Jan. 15, 1927), p. 3 et seq.

¹¹ Hu Han-Min, *On the Inseparability of the Three Principles*. (Shanghai, 1928), p. 28 et seq.

¹² *Collected Works of Sun Yat Sen*, new and enlarged edition (Shanghai, 1927), Vol. I, "Lectures on the Principle of Democracy," p. 2.

adverse natural conditions and the rival species, and mankind is forced under the penalty of extinction to wage a constant warfare against them. Because of its superior intelligence and social habits mankind emerges triumphant.

The mastery of man over nature and his victory over the rival species mark the beginning of civilization. Man's *physical* existence becomes now more or less assured, and the problem of life begins to take on non-economic aspects although the economic factor remains to be very important. He is no longer satisfied with merely keeping his body and soul together; he wants to live a *higher* life, a life in which he finds the full expression of his personality. Any condition that makes such a life impossible will be resisted, even at the cost of a revolution. And history records many, many instances of such revolutions—some successful, others less so, still others disheartening failures.

A careful study of history enabled Dr. Sun to pronounce that while the underlying motive of all revolutions is invariably the seeking to better the conditions of life, the forms in which they manifest themselves are principally three, namely, the struggle for national independence, the struggle for democratic government and the struggle for economic equality. To express them in every-day language, they are respectively, Nationalism, Democracy, and Socialism. These three words—Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism—in their widest sense, sum up neatly the revolutionary ideals and movements in human history. Here we find the historical foundation of Dr. Sun's famous "Three Principles."

Looking from another angle, Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism may be said to represent three historic problems that have been pressing for solution—the racial problem or the problem of nationality, the political problem, the economic problem. These problems present different degrees of urgency to different countries. In some countries, the racial problem forces itself to the front first; in

others, the political problem claims earliest attention; but in none (of the Western countries) have the three problems presented themselves all at one time for solution. The explanation is, of course, to be found in the objective conditions peculiar to each country. With the range of their vision limited by contemporary conditions, men take cognizance only of that problem which is most pressing on them. Thus Jean Jacques Rousseau, his sensitive soul chafing under the despotism of the French monarchy, addressed himself exclusively to the problem of democratic government without even dreaming of an economic problem in its modern setting; or Karl Marx, living in a period when the evils of the capitalistic system was most apparent, saw in the social revolution the panacea for all social troubles, ignoring completely the strength of the national sentiment—which oversight, by the way, is responsible for the debacle of the Second International. Dr. Sun was the first and the only revolutionary leader who had seen the unity and interrelation of the three problems and who had committed a great revolutionary party to work for their simultaneous solution. To him belongs the credit for having discovered the common underlying motive force of the Nationalist movement, the Democratic movement and the Socialist movement; for having founded a system of social philosophy embracing the ideals of Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism; and for having insisted upon the realization of all of these ideals as the only sure way to perpetual peace and happiness. Not that Dr. Sun possessed superior intelligence than either Rousseau or Marx, although it must be admitted that everywhere he did exhibit a remarkably keen insight, but that he had the advantage of having lived to see many new signs of the times unknown to Rousseau and Marx. In other words, Dr. Sun's theory of "Three Principles" is not the concoction of a closet philosopher, but a prescription made out after a careful diagnosis of the world situation in general and the Chinese problem in particular. It is

scientific in every sense of that word.

Let us take a cursory view of China in its Twentieth Century setting. On the eve of the 1911 Revolution we find China ruled, or rather misruled, by an alien and defiantly ignorant race, the Manchus. The form of government was monarchy of the most despotic variety, and the life and property of the common people were completely at the mercy of the Mandarins. The Imperial House seemed to be more interested in getting revenues and keeping the Chinese from revolt than in the welfare of the nation. Meantime from without the highly industrialized nations of the West were closing in on China. They need raw materials and cheap labor for their factories, and foreign markets for their surplus capital and products, and China has all of them aplenty. So the process of exploitation began, following in the main the usual steps of imperialism as described by J. A. Hobson in *Imperialism* (New York, 1902); by Rudolf Hilferding in *Finance Capital* (Vienna, 1910); by Nicolai Lenin in *Imperialism: the Last Stage of Capitalism* (Petrograd, 1917); by T. P. Moon in *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York, 1926). The series of treaties concluded at the end of the Opium War secured for the imperialist powers Extraterritoriality and Conventional Tariff, arrangements which gave the imperialists political control over China and advantageous terms for trading with China. This completed the first stage, the stage of Commercial-Imperialism. The next stage, the stage of Industrial-Imperialism, was consummated when the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895 conceded to the Japanese subjects and, by virtue of the "most-favored nation" treatment, to all imperialist subjects, the right "to engage in all kinds of manufacturing industries in all the open cities, towns and ports of China."¹⁸ The consortium formed in 1911 for financing "Chinese currency re-

¹⁸ John V. A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements With and Concerning China*, (New York, 1921), Number 1895/3, Vol. I, p. 21.

form and industrial development" and later consortiums ushered in the third and last stage of imperialism, that of Finance-Imperialism.¹⁴ Thus by 1911 the imperialist powers controlled the Chinese finance, stocked the Chinese Market with machine made goods, and opened many factories in China to take full advantage of the cheap native labor. They had nothing to fear from native competition, for they could produce and market their products cheaper than the Chinese, thanks to their industrial efficiency and their control of the Chinese tariff. Sixty years after the Nanking Treaty of 1842, the Chinese village and small handicrafts economy was definitely broken down under the iron hoofs of capital-imperialism, and a vast majority of the small peasants and craftsmen became paupers. The net result of all these developments was social, political and economic unrest in China.

The Revolution of 1911 overthrew the Manchu monarchy and established the Chinese Republic, but it failed to improve the situation otherwise. In place of the old monarchy, a horde of war lords, remnants of the feudal past, sprang up, who overran the country with incessant and internecine warfare amongst themselves for spoils and booties. The shrewd imperialists saw in this state of affairs a golden opportunity for further robbery, and an unholy alliance was immediately concluded with the *Tuchunnate* to perpetuate it. The militarists played the part of puppets; the imperialists, the wire-pullers. This formula sums up the history of the first sixteen years of the Chinese Republic. The economic, political and international situation of the nation kept deteriorating every day until

¹⁴ John V. A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements With and Concerning China* (New York, 1921), No. 1911/2, Vol. I, pp. 841 *et seq.*; No. 1913/5, Vol. II, pp. 1007 *et seq.* Documents of the so-called "New Consortium" of 1920 are published by the Division of International Law, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, as No. 40 of its Pamphlet Series.

China became little more than a "sub-colony," to use Dr. Sun's favorite term.

It is not difficult to see from the foregoing picture that China has at once a racial problem, a political problem and an economic problem. Racially she is completely dominated by the white people in her political, economic and even cultural life. Politically her four hundred million souls are chafing under the tyranny of an irresponsible military government, formed by the feudalistic war lords with the secret support of the imperialists. Economically the whole nation is in a state of bankruptcy, the old economy having broken down and the new economy still in its early infancy. Nothing short of immediate solution of all of the three problems will save her from ultimate ruin. National independence must be won by striking down imperialism and by abolishing the unequal treaties; civil rights and liberties must be secured by putting an end to the present feudal-military régime; a minimum standard of economic life must be guaranteed to each and all by a system of social production and distribution. In short, what has taken Europe hundreds of years to accomplish must be accomplished in China in a few crowded years. Here we find the objective *raison d'être* of Dr. Sun's "Three Principles."

How are the "Three Principles" to be realized? By revolution, Dr. Sun would say without a moment's hesitation. There are to be two distinct revolutions, in fact—a political revolution and a social revolution. The former is destructive and is to be brought about by military force; the latter is constructive and is to be achieved by parliamentary action. But one is just as important and necessary as the other, for the political revolution is to pave the way for the social revolution by ridding the country of imperialists and feudal militarists, while the social revolution is to realize the end and aim of the political revolution by carrying out the program of social and economic reconstruction. In terms of Dr. Sun's "Three Principles," the Principle of Nationalism

furnishes the ideal of the political revolution, while the Principle of Democracy and the Principle of Livelihood constitute the program of the social revolution, although one must admit that there is quite a bit of overlapping here.

The nature and character of the Chinese Revolution should be clear in view of what has just been said. It can neither be, maintained Dr. Sun, a bourgeois-democratic revolution, like the French Revolution of 1789, resulting in the establishment of capitalism and plutocracy, nor a communist revolution, like the Russian November Revolution of 1917, leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat. These latter are *class* movements animated by *class* interests, and are incompatible with the Chinese situation. China, as a nation, is in bondage; her four hundred million people form one big oppressed class. The issue is not between one class of Chinese society and another, but rather between the Chinese people in one camp and feudal-imperialism in the other. The Chinese Revolution, therefore, must be and can only be a *Kuo Min Kê Ming*, or a "National (not nationalist) Revolution" as Lenin would say¹⁵—that is, it must be a revolution of the whole of the Chinese people (barring, of course, a handful of war lords and their retinues) against a common enemy and for a common good. In other words, the aims of the Chinese Revolution are to be achieved by all classes—peasants, workers, students, craftsmen, etc.—jointly fighting a common battle and not by any form of class struggle. The aspirations of the middle-class Democrats (*Kuo Chia Chu I Tsê*, as they are called in China), on the right and the rash Communists on the left are, therefore, misguided.

This naturally raises the long-deferred question of what are the ultimate aims of the Chinese Revolution, or, to put it in

¹⁵ The theory of "National Revolution" was clearly set forth by Lenin in a series of theses submitted to, and adopted by, the Second Congress of the Communist International (July 17 to August 7, 1920).

a different way, what are the "Three Principles" of Dr. Sun. To answer this question adequately we propose to devote the remaining chapters of this book. Here it is sufficient to give a bare outline just to complete the picture of the Sunyatsenian theoretical system.

In the foregoing pages we have traced the origin of Dr. Sun's "Three Principles" to the Nationalist movements, the Democratic movements and the Socialist movements in the history of Western Europe. But it will be a great mistake to infer from this that Dr. Sun's "Three Principles" are respectively Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism as they are commonly understood in the West. If that were the case, Dr. Sun would not be as great a figure as he actually was, and ever shall be.

The first principle is the *Min T'su Chu I*, commonly translated as the Principle of Nationalism for the lack of an appropriate term. But it is as different from the nationalism of the usual chauvinistic variety as it can be, its key-note being absolute self-determination for every nationality in the world. More concretely it has a three-fold significance: (1) complete emancipation of the Chinese people itself; (2) absolute equality amongst all nationalities within China; (3) deliverance of other subject nationalities in the world from the imperialist yoke. In short, internationalism is the goal of Dr. Sun's nationalism, while his nationalism is the road to internationalism.

The second principle is the *Min Chuan Chu I*, usually translated as the Principle of Democracy. But it is as different from the Anglo-American bourgeois democracy as the *Min T'su Chu I* is unlike the nationalism of the traditional order. The ultimate source of governmental authority lies in the *Kuo Min Ta Hui* or the All-China Congress composed of delegates elected by the people grouped into functional units. To the government belong the five "governmental powers"—legislative, executive, judicial, censorial and examination. To the people belong the

four "political rights"—elective, initiative, referendum and recall. This, it is believed, will create a strong and efficient government with, at the same time, adequate popular control—a happy solution of the age-old problem of authority versus liberty.

The third principle is the *Min Sheng Chu I*, sometimes translated as the Principle of Socialism, but more appropriately as the Principle of Livelihood. It seeks to attain the ideal of Communism by political as distinguished from revolutionary action. The chief means proposed are: (1) heightened social production; (2) regulation of private capital; (3) "equalization" of land ownership. It will be seen that it undertakes to complete the industrial and the social revolution in one breath.

Moreover, the "Three Principles" are interrelated and inseparable in two different senses. In the first place, the success of one principle is conditioned by the success of the other two. Thus, for example, without having struck down imperialism—that is, without having the Principle of Nationalism realized—it is futile to talk of democracy and livelihood. In the second place, the operation of one principle is limited by that of the other two. The Sunyatsenian nationalism will not turn into militarism and jingoism because it is limited by the working of the Principles of Democracy and Livelihood. In the same way, his democracy will not be plutocracy and his Principle of Livelihood will not be capitalism. We shall have occasion to return to this point again and at greater length in another chapter.

IV.

Dr. Sun had given to the Chinese Revolution not only high philosophical ideals, but also a concrete program showing how these ideals may be gradually realized. This fact at once removes Dr. Sun from the ranks of dreamers and utopians.

No one is more conscious than Dr. Sun himself of the fact that the "Three Prin-

ciples" cannot be achieved overnight, especially in a country like China where illiteracy is high and where economic development has barely begun. In pursuance of this conviction, Dr. Sun insisted upon *gradual progress* and divided his *Program of National Reconstruction*¹⁶ into three distinct periods, each period with its special program of work.

The first period is called the Military Period, the period when military force is extensively used in seizing power and unifying the country. "During the Military Period," wrote Dr. Sun, "all machineries will be placed under the Military Government. The latter will, on the one hand, use its military force to overcome domestic resistance; on the other hand, propagate the 'Principles' to convert and educate the people so as to facilitate the unification of the nation."

"When any province has been completely brought under the sway of the Revolution, then the Military Period ends so far as that province is concerned and the Training Period begins." In this second period, it is the duty of the Government to train the people in the art of self-government, in the exercise of political rights and duties, in perfecting local self-government with the district as the basic administrative unit and, in general, laying the foundation for the next period. In Dr. Sun's own words, "During the Training Period, the Government will send properly qualified officials to every district to prepare the people for their work of self-government. Complete self-government for a district can be said to have been attained only when a census has been taken of the district population, when a survey of the district land has been made, when a police system for the maintenance of public order in the district has been established, when a system of highways has been built in the district,

¹⁶ *Collected Works of Sun Yat Sen*, new and enlarged edition, (Shanghai, 1927), Vol. II, "Plans for National Reconstruction," pp. 1-4.

when the people have completed their training for the exercise of the four political rights and the fulfilling of civil duties, and when they are qualified to elect a magistrate to carry on the administrative work of the district government and representatives to make laws for the district."

When all the districts in a province have perfected their machinery of self-government, then that province passes into the third period, the Constitutional Period. The Governor of the province will be elected by the All-province Congress. Meantime the National Government will experiment on the new scheme of government, the government of five independent branches—legislative, executive, judicial, censorial and public examination.

"When a majority of the provinces in the country have reached the Constitutional Period, i.e., when these provinces have effective local self-governments, an All-China Congress will be held to adopt a national constitution and to promulgate the same." After that being done, the ultimate authority of the National Government will rest with the All-China Congress; that is to say, the latter body will have the right of electing and recalling officers of the National Government, and of initiating measures and demanding referendum upon the same. This completes the program of national reconstruction in terms of self-government. It is, of course, understood that economic reconstruction will be carried on in the meantime.

An interesting comparison may be made of Dr. Sun's "Three Periods" with Karl Marx's three stages in the social revolution. Dr. Sun's Military Period corresponds to Marx's seizure of power; his Training Period closely resembles Marx's dictatorship of the proletariat while the Constitutional Period suggests the ultimate Socialist state. How far was Dr. Sun actually inspired by Marx in this it is impossible to tell.