

MANUFACTURING THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE RECENT MONARCHICAL MOVEMENT IN CHINA

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When in December, 1915, I was reading the numerous telegraphic messages from the provinces urging Mr. Yuan Shih-kai to become emperor, my curiosity was aroused by the fact that while the messages differed from one another both in conception and in execution, there were forty odd words which occurred together in all of them. These words were:

We, representatives of the citizens, by virtue of the will of the people, do hereby reverently nominate the present President Yuan Shih-kai as Emperor of the Chinese Empire, and invest him with all the supreme sovereign rights of the state. May he serve Heaven and lay the foundation to be transmitted to his heirs throughout ten thousand generations!

To any observant reader it was apparent that some master hand had been behind all those lengthy and flowery memorials; for otherwise it would be utterly inexplicable how the province of Kansuh and the province of Kiangsu (to take the two extremes), could use the same highbrow language of "the will of the people" and "the supreme sovereign rights of the state."

This surmise was not incorrect. These words, forty-five in all in the original, were secretly telegraphed from the monarchist headquarters in Peking to all the military and civil governors of the provinces on October 23, 1915, with the instruction that they must be inserted in the "memorials of nomination." This and many other secret telegrams sent from the monarchist headquarters in Peking to the various provinces, all of which to be deciphered

either with the *Hua* code or with the code of the executive mansion, have been collected from those provinces later taking part in the third revolution and have since been published in several languages. No better introduction to this most remarkable collection of historic documents is needed than the following passage from the last telegram in this collection dated December 21, 1915:

Since the promulgation of the law on the formation of the convention of the citizens' representatives, we, who are devoted to the welfare of the state, have desired to see that the decisions of that convention do not run counter to the wishes of the people. We have therefore striven so to apply the law as to meet the real needs and circumstances, adhering to the law whenever possible, and yielding to expediency whenever necessary. In carrying out this policy, there may have been certain letters and telegrams, both official and private, which have transgressed the bounds of the law. They will become absolutely useless when the affair is finished. Moreover, no matter how carefully their secrets are guarded, they will always remain as concrete records which might seriously compromise us; and . . . should they be handed down as part of the national records, they will stain the opening pages of the history of the new dynasty. The central government, after carefully considering the matter, has concluded that it would be better to sort out and burn the documents in order to remove all unnecessary records and prevent regrettable consequences. For these reasons, you are hereby requested to sift out all telegrams, letters and despatches concerning the change in the form of government (excepting those required by law to be filed on record), and cause the same to be burnt in your presence.

But this measure of precaution was already too late. It was sent out on the 21st of December, and on that very day troops were mobilized in the province of Yunnan, and two days later the famous Yunnan ultimatum reached Peking, demanding the immediate punishment of the leaders of the monarchist propaganda. The independence of that province was proclaimed on December 25, thus beginning the third revolution which lasted until the death of Yuan Shih-kai on June 6, 1916.

A complete history of the monarchist movement in China has yet to be written. Only a brief summary of its important steps can be given here. We shall not go back to Yuan Shih-kai's expulsion by force of the opposition members

in the national assembly, and the consequent dissolution of that body for lacking a quorum. Nor need we to take up the long story of the revision of the constitution and of the presidential election act which gave the president absolute powers and made his term of office not only permanent but also hereditary.¹ Suffice to say that Yuan Shih-kai and his clique were not satisfied with a virtually permanent and hereditary presidency. They wanted a full-formed monarchy, and they set out to realise that aim with a political skilfulness and dexterity which must surprise many a professional politician of the west.

The first step in the grand scheme for the overthrow of the republic and for the establishment of a monarchy was to call for "voluntary" petitions from the people urging a change in the form of government. We quote from the code telegram to the governors of the provinces dated August 30, 1915:

We propose that petitions be sent in the name of the citizens of the respective provinces to the administrative council acting in the capacity of national legislature, so as to demonstrate the wish of the people to have a monarchy. . . . The plan suggested is for each province to send in a separate petition, the draft of which will be made here and wired to the respective provinces in due course of time. . . . At all events, the change in the form of the state will have to be effected under the color of carrying out the people's will.

From another code telegram, dated September 10, 1915, we learn that "not fewer than one hundred petitions for a change in the form of the state have been received from people residing in all parts of the country." That was sufficient to prove that "the people were of one mind concerning this matter." By this time the administrative council had passed a law providing for a general convention of the representatives of the people to decide upon the question of a change in the form of government. A national convention bureau was established by the government with the monarchist clique in full control of it. On September 10, the bureau sent telegraphic instructions to the governors, "explaining confidentially, article by article, how to apply

¹ See my article in *The Outlook*, September 1, 1915.

the law in order to produce the desired results." We quote the first two sections of the instructions:

Article I of the law provides that "the petitioning for a change in the form of the state shall be decided by the general convention of the citizens' representatives." The words "shall be decided by the general convention of the citizens' representatives" refer to nothing more than a formal approval of the convention, and are by no means intended to give room for discussion of any kind. Indeed, it was never intended that the citizens should have any choice between a republic and a monarchy. For this reason, at the time of voting all the representatives must be made unanimously to advocate a change of the republic into a monarchy. It behooves you, therefore, prior to the election and voting, privately to search for *such persons as are willing to express the people's will in the sense above indicated*. You will also make the necessary arrangements beforehand so that there may be no divergence of opinion when the time arrives for putting the question to a vote.

Article II provides: "The citizens' representatives shall be elected by separate ballot signed by the person voting. The person obtaining the greatest number of votes cast shall be declared elected." Now, the citizens' representatives, though nominally elected by the electors, are in reality appointed beforehand by you acting as Superintendent of Election. The principle of separate signed ballot is adopted in this article with the object of preventing the voters from voting otherwise than as directed, and of awakening in them a sense of responsibility for their votes. Again, since the law says that the person obtaining the greatest number of votes cast shall be declared elected, it is necessary for you to have everything prepared beforehand. You should, prior to the voting, divide the electors into groups, and assign to each group the names of the persons intended to be elected. Furthermore, deputies should be appointed to supervise the proceedings, and the voters are to be privately instructed to vote according to the secret list of names. In this way the persons elected will not be such as will get beyond our control.

But all this red tape, though very ingeniously devised, was still too slow for the impatient would-be founders of the new dynasty. Thus spoke Mr. Sun Yu-Chun, the impetuous president of the Chiu-An-Hwei (Society for the Preservation of Peace) in a code telegram dated September 26, 1915:

. Moreover, the situation is critical and the country is in great unrest. How can we wait for the convention of the citizens' representatives which will not meet until several

months hence! Thus a new method for obtaining the people's will has to be devised.

This "new method" consists in this:

The military and civil governors of the provinces are requested to call an extraordinary meeting of the general convention of citizens, in which each district (hsien) is to be represented by one person to be selected from among the gentry or common people of the district who are residing in the provincial capital. The voting shall take place by signed ballot on which the word "monarchy" or republic is to be written. The military and civil governors and the military commandants, acting as superintendents of election, shall open the ballots then and there. In case a majority of the votes are in favor of a monarchy, the persons so voting shall forthwith name a person who is to be the emperor. The military and civil governors and the military commandants shall then report by telegram to the administrative council the number of votes and the name of the person recommended as emperor; and the general convention of citizens shall simultaneously despatch a telegram to the administrative council, authorizing the latter to announce the number of votes in favor of a monarchy and the name of the person nominated. You are earnestly requested to make immediate preparations therefor.

... We may add that though this plan is proposed by us alone, it will differ in no material respect from that which the administrative council will eventually adopt.

The last sentence which I have put into italics, is worth noting. These are the words of the head of a nominally private organization which was founded for the purpose of "studying the problem of the form of government," and which had the audacity to predict what plans the administrative council acting in the capacity of national legislature, would "eventually adopt!"

The administrative council, however, did not have the courage to dispense with the formality of a national election. Says a code telegram from the Chiu-An-Hwei dated September 27, 1915:

In order to clothe the proceedings with an appearance of gravity, the representatives of the districts, though really appointed by the highest authorities of the province, should still be nominally elected by the districts. As soon as the representatives of the districts have been appointed, their names should be communicated to the magistrates of the respective districts, who are to be instructed to draw up the necessary documents formally

nominating the persons designated. Such documents, however, should be properly antedated.

But the administrative council, as predicted, did abandon the plan of holding the general convention of the citizens' representatives (kuoh-ming tai-piao ta hwei), and adopted instead the device of holding a convention of citizens (kung-ming ta hwei) in each provincial capital. There was to be a primary election at which a certain number of electors were to be elected whose duty it was to proceed to the provincial capital where a second election was to be held for the selection of delegates to the convention. On October 10, 1915, the national convention bureau telegraphed these interesting instructions:

All the superintendents of the primaries (i.e., the district magistrates) are absolutely responsible for having the proper persons elected within their respective districts. They should, before the elections, carefully consider what sort of men are those who are qualified to be elected, and select those who are good-natured and obsequious and of the same mind as ourselves. These are to be considered as the persons who should be elected. The superintendents will then judiciously assign their names to the several voters, and request them to vote as directed. If they find any difficulty in carrying out these instructions, *they should not hesitate to use measures that are invisibly coercive, in order to obtain the desired results from the voting.*

The method of manipulating the electors after their arrival at the provincial capital is contained in another telegram dated October 11.

. When the electors of the districts have reported themselves at the provincial capital, a reception committee should be appointed to meet them and exchange views with them. The superintendents of election should then, under pretext of inviting them to a social gathering or dinner party, request their presence at their official mansion and improve the occasion by explaining to them the fundamental principles of the monarchical movement as well as the general situation of the country, and by making known to them the names of those who are to be elected. *No methods should be left untried until our objects are achieved.*

On October 26, the national convention bureau sent out this code telegram:

After the form of the state has been put to a vote, the nomination of an emperor should be made forthwith without further voting. You should address the delegates and tell them that a monarchy having been decided upon, not a single day should pass without a monarch; that the delegates should now nominate Yuan Shih-kai as the Great Emperor of the Chinese Empire; and that if they are in favor of the proposal, they should signify their assent by a standing vote. This done, the text of the proposed petition of nomination should be handed to the delegates for their signatures. After that, you should again address them to the effect that in all matters concerning the nomination and the petition for immediate enthronement, they may, in the name of the citizens' representatives, invest the administrative council with general powers to act in their behalf and to take the necessary steps until the petition is finally granted. The prepared text of the telegram from the delegates to the acting legislative council should then be shown to the delegates for approval.

. . . . As for the exact words to be inserted in the petition of nomination, they have been communicated to you in our telegram of the 23rd inst. These characters, forty-five in all,² must on no account be altered. The rest of the text is left to your discretion.

The rest of the story the world well knows. These secret instructions were carried out to the letter. The citizens' conventions were held at the various provincial capitals. The voting was done by signed ballots in the presence of the military and civil governors and military commanders as superintendents of election, and with armed troops surrounding the convention halls for the protection of the delegates and for the preservation of peace and order. The voting was of course unanimous in favor of changing the republic into a monarchy. Memorials of nomination were then signed by the delegates, "reverently nominating the present President Yuan Shih-kai as the Great Emperor of the Chinese Empire." The administrative council was then authorized by the delegates to act as their national agent, and the votes of the provincial conventions were transmitted to that body for final counting and announcement. The climax of the drama was reached when on November 11, 1915, the administrative council met and announced that out of 2043 votes cast, 1993 voted in favor of changing the republic into a monarchy. Thereupon, the council immediately petitioned President Yuan Shi-kai,

²Quoted at the beginning of this article.

urging him to accept the throne so unanimously tendered him by the people. President Yuan of course declined the honor, and it was not until the petition had been presented to him the second time that he reluctantly declared his acceptance and ordered that "all the ministers and departments make the necessary preparations for the enthronement." The last order was entirely unnecessary, for the bureau on preparations for the great ceremony had long been at work with its offices in the presidential palace.

The will of the people having so unanimously expressed itself, it became necessary to reward the founders of the new dynasty who had so dexterously brought this will into articulate expression. Thus, for example, in two days (December 21 and 23), two hundred and six titles of nobility were awarded by Emperor-elect Yuan Shih-kai, of this number there being 6 dukes, 9 marquises, 13 counts, 10 earls and 36 barons, all of the First Order; 1 duke, 3 earls and 19 barons of the Second Order; 30 barons of the Third Order; 55 Knights of the Light Chariot of the First Order, 19 Knights of the Second Order, and 4 Orders of Merit. These honors did include Messrs. Sun Yu-chun, Yang Tu, Ku Ngao, Liang Szeyi, Tuan Chi-kwei, *et al.*, the real founders of the dynasty. It was reported that this delay was caused by the fact that these gentlemen were unable to reach an agreement as to the proper titles they were to receive from the new emperor.

Before any workable agreement was reached among the emperor-makers themselves, the third revolution had spread over several provinces. The government's well-paid but very poorly disciplined troops proved to be no match for the patriotically inspired soldiers of the punitive expedition. One province after another declared independence, and joined the revolution. But Mr. Yuan still hoped to retain his presidency at the price of his emperorship. So a decree was issued on March 22, 1916, pleading for his "lack of virtue," cancelling his acceptance of the imperial throne, and ordering that all the petitions for a change in the form of the state and for his enthronement be returned through

the administrative council to the original petitioners to be burnt and destroyed.

But this act of virtue and repentance had no longer any effect on the rebellious provinces which continued to secede from the central government, until finally even Governor Chen Yi of Sze-chuen and Governor Tong Shiang-ming of Hu-nan, both of whom had long been regarded by Mr. Yuan as his most loyal supporters, were compelled by the popular uprising to proclaim the independence of their respective provinces. That came like a death blow to the ex-emperor who, according to reports, fell ill five days after the secession of Hu-nan, and died on June 6, 1916, after an illness of one week.

After Yuan Shih-kai's death, the vice-president, General Li Yuen-hung, who had defied the many threats of the monarchists and had persistently refused all the honors which the new dynasty insisted upon giving him, automatically became president of the republic. On June 29, the first constitution of the republic proclaimed on March 11, 1912, was restored. And on July 14, the military congress which had been the central authority of all the rebelling provinces, was dissolved and the third revolution was declared to be at an end.

Here ends our story. It has not been a pleasant duty for me, a Chinese, to tell it to the world. Although I have greatly rejoiced that a false god which the world had created through its own credulity, has at last been shattered to dust, I have, however, no present interest in once more disclosing Yuan Shih-kai's "lack of virtue." Mr. Yuan has written his own epitaph with his own deeds, and it is no courage to slay the slain. What has really inspired me to write this account, is my belief that the whole episode may furnish the world with a fresh proof of China's sincerity in her democratic aspirations and in her strife for an upright and enlightened government. An American writer has well said: "I do not believe that the Chinese Revolution has failed, for I do not believe that it is finished."³

³ Gardner L. Harding, *Present-day China*, p. 9.

The first Chinese republic of 1912 has not failed, for it has never been given a fair trial. It died an abortive death, but its spirit has persisted and grown despite the skill and the organized strength of the reactionary forces under the leadership of Yuan Shih-kai and his clique. The internal political struggle in China during the last several years has been a struggle of New China, the child of the intellectual revolution of the last quarter of a century, against Chinese officialdom which has been corrupting and weakening the nation for centuries. The dramatic episode of the monarchical restoration which I have documentarily sketched above, sufficiently illustrates the personnel, the spirit and the method of official China. It achieved its consummate success on the day when the administrative council announced to the world that out of 2043 representatives of the people, 1993 voted for the immediate enthronement of Yuan Shih-kai. But official China miscalculated its own strength and misunderstood the spirit of the nation. It failed to see that when it had to put up at least the appearance of "going to the people" for approval and sanction of its actions, its death knell was already tolled and its final downfall assured. Its last efforts of political engineering and downright corruption only helped to consolidate new China and to drive the moderates and even the conservatives into the camp of the revolutionists. The third revolution was not undertaken by the ultra-radicals of the type of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. It was led largely by such moderate leaders as Tsai Ao and Liang Chi-Chiao, and supported by the radicals. Against this consolidated new China, Chinese officialdom was impotent. And great was the fall of it.

It is true that official China has not yet entirely given up the fight, and that the Chinese revolution is not yet finished. But the monarchist movement has helped to bring its main issue into prominent relief: it is a fight between New China and Chinese officialdom. May what has been said above serve to convince the world that young China is earnest in her struggle for democracy and enlightenment!