

Puppeteers Over China

THE WAYS OF THE ORIENT seem strange to the Western mind. But only when viewed superficially. Basic economic forces are universally identical, although often obscured by mental habits, law and the flubdubbery of local custom.

Japanese monopolists, their scheme for exploiting Chinese coolies having met with serious obstacles, hit upon the idea of establishing a "National Government of China" in the area controlled by their soldiers. Wang Ching-wei was selected as the puppet-in-chief. Wang's record of apostasy is notorious: at various times he has espoused and denounced the cause of the Chinese revolutionary patriarch, Sun Yat-Sen; he has opposed Chiang Kai-Shek because the latter opposed Communism and then abandoned Communism to join Chiang against Japan; now he is Japan's best friend in China.

Was this record his recommendation for the job Japan has selected for him? Perhaps. But Wang is also one of the powerful landlords of China. One of the three planks in the platform of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) calls for a change in the land tenure of the country—"only land for those who use it." Stemming from the reforms advocated by Sun Yat-Sen, who was an admirer of Henry George, this land program has been the cause of more dissension among Chinese than has met the public eye.

The selection of Wang may reveal much Japanese cunning. It is known that within the Kuomintang there is a landlord clique who, while distrusting overlordship from Tokyo, look with little favor upon the prospect of the promised land reforms. Suppose the Japanese, through landlord Wang, entice this clique with assurances that their rent-collecting privileges will not be disturbed if they join the new "National Government of China?" A successful Kuomintang might deprive them of their loot completely; sharing it with the Japanese might be as profitable to them as the Indo-British rent-sharing pact is to the Indian princes. "Law and order" encourages production, production increases rent, and there is more to divide among all who own or control the system.

Whether the ruse will work depends upon the ability of the landlords within the Kuomintang to

deliver something substantial to the Japanese, whether they trust Japanese promises, whether Chiang Kai-shek may counter with more dependable promises—such as the proposition that life is more desirable than rent.