

said that he did not want to disturb the alliance with Russia, merely take action against plotters, but he laid down limitations on the CP's further involvement in the KMT. These included limits on the number of communists on the KMT executive, a CCP membership list to be supplied to Chiang, no communist to have a leading KMT or government post, and no nationalist to join the CCP without permission. In addition, the ability of the CCP to act separately from the KMT was curtailed.

The coup against the CCP helped consolidate Chiang's own power and influence within the KMT. The only leader who might have stood against him, the "left" Wang Ching-wei, was having a "rest cure" in Europe. For the time being at least, Chiang was in control.

Chiang had, in fact, shown his colours, despite his later declaration that he was still friendly to the CI and the USSR. He maintained that he had simply wanted to stop certain Russians and CCPers and promised to restrict the nationalist right-wing as a balance. But, once again, the CI representatives (eg. Borodin) chose to stay with Chiang, urging the communists to keep their heads down and follow the nationalist lead.

Stalin's line had not changed, even though circumstances clearly had. The CCP, led by Chen Tu-hsiu, wanted to move to a "bloc without", but Stalin insisted on retaining the united front, while telling the CCP to bloc with the left and maintain their independence. Stalin blamed the CCP for failing to sufficiently build the KMT left, but forbade them to attempt to take over the party, urging instead that they build the left and attempt to turn the centre and right of the KMT against each other. At the same time, he warned them against alienating the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie as he said these elements could still be influenced by the left.

In fact, none of Stalin's instructions made any sense. There was no real left within the KMT, and the CCP were powerless to create one. The KMT was led by the armed right and centre, and the communists had been subordinated to it by Chiang's manoeuvrings and Stalin's treachery. Because of Moscow's insistence on the maintenance of the united front from within, and Chiang's terms for that, the CCP would do little to turn the mass movements of workers against Chiang — because that would mean turning them against the KMT. Stalin persisted in labelling Chiang a revolutionary and demanded that the CCP conciliate him.

It was obvious to most of the Chinese Communist Party leadership that Chiang's leftism was just a pose, but without breaking with Stalin, they could not fight Chiang, or fight for their own goals. Such "left" as existed within the KMT was around Wang, who had already shown his unwillingness to fight Chiang. When things got difficult he just left the political centres for Europe.

## The Northern Expedition

THESE contradictions became even more obvious when the Northern Expedition (to unify China by armed force against the warlords) began in July 1926. To aid the expedition, the communists stepped up their agitation amongst the peasants along the army's route. The peasants were ready to seize the land, and to fight the landlords and the warlords who maintained them. But the policy of united front prevented the social revolution in the countryside. There were few demands about which the communists and nationalists could agree.

By 1927 the communists were forced to restrain the peasants, urging only seizure of lands from the biggest landlords; the small landlords and those landlords who were part of the KMT were left alone. By the end of 1926 the nationalists had only authorised the demand for a 25% cut in rents for the peasants, while Stalin was demanding that the communists should "restrain" the peasants, to avoid antagonising the nationalist generals (who were also landlords).

The same was true in the cities, with the labour movement. Armed labour pickets and strikes destabilised the warlords' economy to help the nationalist troops. These activities were organised by unions led by the communists. But as soon as a city fell under nationalist control, the strikes were forbidden and the pickets disarmed. To maintain the united front, the CCP had to help end strikes (like the Hong Kong-Canton strike, called off in October 1926, without major gains).

Yet at the same time as the social revolution

was being halted by Stalin's policy, Stalin himself was calling on the CCP to make use of the "revolutionary potential" of the "revolutionary nationalist" government. Stalin forbade the CCP to break the terms of the agreement with the KMT on land redistribution, while arguing that the KMT's policy of trying to buy off the urban petit-bourgeoisie by seizing the land of the big bourgeoisie and reducing rents would foster agrarian revolution.

The nationalists did not want social revolution, urban and rural, and the Chinese communists could see that perfectly well, but they were forced to maintain the united front, and at the same time try to stay true to the peasants and workers. It was an impossible situation. To maintain the united front the CP had only one course open to it — to restrain the revolution which they had helped create. Anything else risked a backlash from the KMT right, and the break-up of the united front.

## In Shanghai the workers established a workers' government, which was in effective control of the city.

### Shanghai (1927)

AS Chiang's armies approached Shanghai, the CCP-led Shanghai GLU began a series of strikes and protests against the warlords and imperialists who ran the city. In line with Stalin's confused policy, the CCP decided to attempt to take control of the city and hand it over to Chiang's nationalist forces.

With Chiang's troops 25 miles from Shanghai, the SGLU called a general strike, which paralysed the city. There was street fighting, and a bloody repression. The communists called off the strike on 24 February, but prepared for further action. Chiang's forces, which had stopped during the fighting, moved again on 21 March, and a second general strike was called, this time backed up by an armed rebellion.

The workers established a workers' government, which was in effective control of the city, raising demands for improved working conditions. At the same time, with Chiang's troops just outside Shanghai, in other parts of China leftists and union leaders were being repressed by the nationalists. Anti-communist purges took place in various central Chinese cities, and 19 communists were to be executed in Peking less than a month later.

When Chiang arrived in Shanghai on 26 March, he immediately set about preparations for an anti-communist coup. He set up a rival government and negotiated with reactionary forces for an armed showdown. The CI insisted on maintaining the united front, even though it was obvious that Chiang meant to break it decisively.

The communists were instructed to prepare for a coup, but not to provoke it, if necessary hiding their weapons. There was to be no withdrawal from the KMT. At the same time as the CP paper was warning of the dangers of nationalist repression, the workers were still applauding and welcoming Chiang. A small force of pickets was armed and trained, but instructed not to act. The CCP, and thus the workers' organisations, were effectively paralysed.

On 12th April, Chiang's Shanghai massacre began. The CCP organisation and the labour unions were crushed at a stroke, and hundreds of leading communists rounded up. Protest demonstrations were fired upon, killing several hundreds, and in other Chinese cities communists were rounded up and hundreds killed. Unions and labour organisations were outlawed, and many communist leaders were forced to flee the cities or go into hiding. In the space of a few days, thousands of leftists were killed or arrested, and the labour movement brutally crushed. Chiang declared a new national government in Nanking, in opposition to the government in Wuhan — also called a national government.

Chiang's troops, and the reactionary forces he had bargained with (like secret societies) spent days roaming the streets of Shanghai executing workers at random as a "warning" to others. Demonstrations were ineffective, labour was unarmed for the most part and had not been properly organised to fight back. Even though the communists had expected the

massacre since Chiang's troops had refused to enter the city and join in the battle to take power, they were unprepared to lead the workers against Chiang. The bloody repressions of communists and labour leaders just beginning in other parts of China had pointed to the same conclusion.

The Soviet and CI advisers agreed that Chiang would turn against organised labour in Shanghai. The only people surprised by the events in Shanghai were the workers who had, under communist leadership, welcomed Chiang to the city. Stalin, too, had the gall to evince surprise. A matter of days before the massacre began, the CI and Chiang had exchanged fraternal statements.

On 6th April (six days before the massacre began), Stalin said, of ending the united front: "Why drive away the right, when we have the majority and when the right listens to us? ... Chiang Kai Shek has perhaps no sympathy for the revolution, but he is leading the army and *cannot do otherwise but lead it against the imperialists.*" (My emphasis).

In fact Chiang kept his army away from the fight against the imperialists, hoping that the workers would be crushed. When the workers of Shanghai took power away from the imperialists, Chiang led his army against them. A month before, on 17th March, Chiang too went on record, saying: "I have never taken the view that I cannot co-operate with communists ... I have also made it clear that while I was opposed to oppression of the communists, *I would check their influence as soon as they grew too powerful.*" (My emphasis). While Chiang's reassurances are not worth the paper they are printed on, he does admit something Stalin would like to conceal, i.e. which side of the class struggle he was on.

Trotsky's attitude to the Shanghai coup was one of scorn towards the Stalinists in the CI and China. He all but begged the CCP to reject Stalin's analysis of the disaster, and criticised their policy, as always from the perspective of the irreconcilable class forces in China. While *Pravda* 'regretted' Chiang's coup and the bloodbath of Shanghai, Trotsky writes: "Ever more frequently one hears accusations at our party meetings against the 'ultra-left' Shanghaiers and in general against the Chinese workers for having provoked Chiang Kai Shek by their 'excesses'."

Stalin's attitude to the coup was firstly to avoid all mention of it, and secondly to shift the blame to anywhere except where it belonged.

Two weeks after the massacre, the CI held a meeting of its executive committee (27 April 1927). Roy reported from China, without once referring directly to Chiang's coup. "If Roy's abstract terms were translated into concrete reality, we would end up with: Chiang Kai Shek's anti-communist coup 'has strengthened the bonds between the KMT's left wing and the CCP'. Thus the 'bloc of 4 classes' remained; it merely became necessary to get rid of that part of the big bourgeoisie represented by Chiang Kai Shek. The policy of 'KMT-CCP collaboration' remained; it was only necessary to get rid of the 'KMT right-wing' which Chiang represented, and replace it with the 'KMT left-wing' led by Wang Ching-wei. This, then was the direction given to the 5th Congress of the CCP by the CP representative." (Peng Shu-tse introduction to *Trotsky on China*).

Put at its simplest, Stalin excommunicated Chiang from the KMT-CCP bloc and declared Wang and his Wuhan "national government" the new revolutionary leaders. Thus the policy before and after Chiang's coup was identical — Chiang's connection with the KMT was ignored, and Wang became its leader. All of this, of course, took place completely outside reality. Chiang and Wang were in the same party, Wang consistently avoided showdowns with the KMT conservatives, even at the time of the coup, and there was no evidence at all that, as Stalin said, "the revolutionary KMT in Wuhan, by a determined fight against militarism and imperialism, will in fact be converted into an organ of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the peasantry."

These are precisely the things Stalin was saying about Chiang not two months before, when Chiang too was masquerading as a left-winger. In exactly the same way that Chiang had been declared leader of the revolution, Stalin now named Wang. In exactly the same way the CCP was to fall in behind the new, better, more left-wing KMT. The same rules applied: no agrarian revolution, no anti-KMT agitation, no "excesses", no "provocation". Two CCP members joined the "revolutionary government" in Wuhan as ministers of labour and agriculture. Far from pulling the government to the left, they were in fact used to hold

back the revolution. Once again, the revolutionary movements were paralysed, once again the workers and peasants had no independent voice, no independent party fighting for their interests.

As Trotsky put it at the CI meeting: "...Stalin assumes, and wants the International to assume, the responsibility for the policy of the KMT and the Wuhan government, as he repeatedly assumed the responsibility for the policy of the former 'national government' of Chiang Kai Shek (particularly in his speech of April 5, the stenogram of which has, of course, been kept hidden from the International). We have nothing in common with this policy. We do not want to assume even a shadow of responsibility for the policy of the Wuhan government, and the leadership of the KMT, and we urgently advise the CI to reject this responsibility ... Politicians of the Wang Ching-wei type, under difficult conditions will unite 10 times with Chiang Kai-Shek against the workers and peasants."

Which, of course, is exactly what happened less than two months later, with more slaughter of workers, peasants and communists. Trotsky's demand was for the CP to call for soviets to pull over KMT troops and unite against the reactionary generals, landlords and imperialists. Trotsky urged the revolutionary masses to leave the KMT and to have no confidence in it — but rather to fight in their own name, and to crush those compromisers who stood in their way. "*The Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution will go forward and be victorious either in the soviet form or not at all.*" (Second speech on the Chinese Question, 24 May 1927, emphasis in original).

Tragically, far from being heeded, Trotsky was hounded and ridiculed by the Stalinist CI. When Wang crushed the labour movement and massacred a peasant army in and around Wuhan and expelled and arrested communists from the KMT (the "July 15th expulsion") Stalin reacted predictably. He should have admitted that Trotsky had been right all along. Instead he moved further into the realms of fantasy and declared that, far from being defeated, the revolution had moved onto a "higher plane".

Trotsky stated that the revolution had been defeated, that the labour movement, the trade unions and the CCP had been smashed. In saying this he was stating bald facts — facts concealed as so many others had been by Stalin. Trotsky pointed out that China would now face a period of reaction and counter-revolution, but for Stalin the time had come for the CCP to declare itself, leave the KMT (they had been expelled anyway!) and organise armed uprisings.

These uprisings were no more than adventures to conceal Stalin's disastrous line. These uprisings were doomed to failure — and they failed. In Nanchang in August 1927 those armed revolutionaries still alive after the previous defeat were largely destroyed. The same happened in the 'Hunan-Hupeh Harvest uprisings', the Haifung soviet movement and finally in the Canton Insurrection of December. In Canton alone almost 6,000 people were killed.

If there had been any potential for the CCP to go underground, maintain contact with the workers and peasants and start to rebuild, Stalin's uprisings had destroyed it. The revolution had been defeated in April, Stalin's adventurism finally killed it, ensuring that few communist cadres were left to fight again. The Chinese Communist Party, thanks to Stalin, had missed its opportunities, confused and misled the workers and peasants and finally destroyed itself.

"Bolshevik policy is characterised not only by its revolutionary scope, but also by its political realism ... The greatest task is to know how to recognise in time a revolutionary situation and to exploit it to the end. But it is no less important to understand when this situation is exhausted and converted, from the political point of view, into its antithesis. Nothing is more fruitless and worthless than to show one's fist after the battle..." (Leon Trotsky, *The Chinese Question after the 6th Congress*, 4 October 1928).

Stalin fails on both counts. "Having subordinated the Chinese workers to the bourgeoisie, put the brakes on the agrarian movement, supported the reactionary generals, prevented the appearance of soviets and liquidated those that did appear..." Stalin then blamed the whole mess on Chen Tu-hsiu, and expelled him from the party he had founded. Stalin was truly "the gravedigger of the second Chinese revolution." (Trotsky, *Stalin and the Chinese Revolution*, 26 August 1930).