

A Chinese Marxist in the '20s

By Wang Fan-hsi

I joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1925, at Hangchow in Chekiang province. Then I went to Peking and worked in that district. In 1926 I became a political commissar in the army.

At that time, the Communist military units were taking part in the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition against the war-lords. But I did not serve in the army long, because the Party wanted me to go back to Peking. At the time, Peking had not been 'liberated', but was under the rule of the Peiyong war-lord, Chang Tso-lin, and his 'white terror'. The Party considered it was more important to do revolutionary work in the reactionary area than in the Army. At that time I was a student of Peking University, so I returned to Peking where I became a leading member of the Party's university committee.

The objective situation and conditions were very favourable, and a growing number of students wanted to enter the Party. In a very short time, the university cell of the Party had a membership of more than two hundred. Then I left the university. After Li Ta-chao and other leaders of the Party were executed in the spring of 1927, I became a member of the Peking district committee of the Party.

Then I went to Wuhan, where I was assigned by the Party to work for the revolutionary newspaper *Mingkuo Yak-po*. Wuhan was the seat of the 'Left Kuomintang' government of Wang Ching-wei. But in the autumn, Wang betrayed the revolution and made a compromise with Chiang Kai Shek. So all the comrades were thrown into confusion. I was soon arrested; I was perhaps the first Communist to be arrested at the time by Wang Ching-wei. I was in prison for one month.

After I was released, the Party sent me to Moscow. I studied in the Eastern University (University for Toilers of the Orient) which contained students of more than seventeen nationalities. It was here that I accepted Trotskyism. This was still in 1927. At that time the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism was most severe and strenuous. When I had come to Moscow, of course, I had not known the difference between the two factions. But when I was at Eastern University, I studied the documents issued by the central committee of the CPSU. All these were cut and arranged to favour Stalinism, and yet we could read the difference. Basing our judgement on our experience in China, we concluded that the Trotskyists were right. But in the university there was no Trotskyist organisation.

Then, in the summer of 1928, I was

transferred to Sun Yat-sen University, where we began to organise a Trotskyist tendency. At that time, almost all the students of the Eastern University were won over to Trotskyism and in the Chinese university too Trotskyism was very influential. In the autumn of 1928 we organised a Trotskyist leading committee in the university. This had three members, of whom I was one. We began to organise clandestine work in the Soviet Union, in cooperation with some Russian comrades who were, of course, by then also organising underground. The situation was very difficult, more difficult than that which we found later in China, because of the GPU.

Our clandestine work continued for about one year, from the autumn of 1928 to the summer of 1929. During this period, I was one of the leading members of the Trotskyist tendency in the Soviet Union. I think that at that time there were more than four hundred Chinese Trotskyists, including the comrades in Sun Yat-sen University, those in military schools and some in the Lenin Institute.

In the summer of 1929 I applied to be sent back to China. My application was accepted and I arrived in Shanghai in September of that year. At that time, it was a secret that I was a Trotskyist, so I was able to work inside the Party.

Before we returned to China, we had a meeting in Moscow to discuss how we should work in China. We decided that we should work within the Party to be the best revolutionaries, so that people might know that we were not mere bourgeois intellectuals interested simply in new theories or other novelties, but genuine revolutionaries. We decided that we must prove ourselves to be real revolutionaries through our work for the Party; in that way we would win the confidence of the comrades and be listened to. We thought that we could convince them and win them to our side only in this way. A group of more than twenty Chinese Trotskyists went back to China with me, via Vladivostok, to Shanghai.

When I arrived in Shanghai in September 1929, I was received by Chou En-lai, who at that time was head of both the organisational bureau and the military council of the central committee. I was assigned to work under him, as his assistant in the organisational bureau. So I was put in charge of the Party's work in one of the five districts of Shanghai. Shanghai was the most industrialised city in China, and the work there was directly under the leadership of the central committee rather than under the Kiangsi provincial committee. The Party considered its work in Shanghai to be the most important of all. Under Chou En-lai there were five assistants,

each of whom was assigned to one district of Shanghai. I worked under Chou for about one year.

During this time I kept secret contact with those Trotskyists who had returned to China before me because they had been expelled from the Party in Moscow. They had been expelled from the Chinese Party at the same time as Trotsky was expelled from the Bolshevik Party, since they had been waging an open struggle against the Stalinists. We, on the other hand, had organised only clandestine activity in Moscow, and they did not discover us.

These comrades who had come home before me numbered between thirty and forty. One group of them had gone to Peking, another to Hong Kong, where they had become workers at the Tai-koo Dockyard. Only three of them had come to Shanghai, where they had established a bookshop called New World.

I kept secret contact with these three comrades from the bookshop. They organised the Chinese Trotskyists returning from Moscow, and started to publish an organ called *Our Voice (Wo-men-te-Hua)*, the title of which was taken from Trotsky's pre-revolutionary Paris paper *Nashe Slovo*. *Our Voice* was the first Trotskyist publication in China. This was in 1929. At that time I was still working within the Party and devoting all my time to Party work. The situation was very difficult, indeed dangerous, and I was in fact once arrested during that time.

In the winter of 1929, the Moscow underground organisation was betrayed and all the Trotskyists were arrested. They were put in prison or sent to Siberia. Nobody was sent back to China. As a result, Sun Yat-sen University was closed down, because it was useless for the Stalinists to run the university only to educate Trotskyists.

An informer testified in court that all the students of the university were Trotskyists. In this way, I too was discovered to be a Trotskyist. When my secret was discovered, I was sick in hospital. Chou En-lai came to have a talk with me, and said: "Moscow says that you are a Trotskyist, but we have worked together for a year already and you have done your work very satisfactorily. So you had better make a declaration that you will give up your positions." I agreed to make a declaration and the next day a messenger came to take it.

In my statement I said that I was a Trotskyist and that the resolution passed at the Sixth (1928) Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was wrong. But I said that I would accept the decisions of the majority. I said that I wanted to work in the Party and reserved the right to speak at the next congress. The messenger took the statement back and immediately the official Party organ *Red Banner* announced that I had been expelled. This was how my connection with the Communist Party ended.

Thereafter, for the next 20 years, Wang was a leading Trotskyist militant in China. He was forced into exile after the Maoist victory.