Chen Duxiu, the Chinese Trotskyists, and the War of Resistance

Wang Fanxi


I walked all the way to Nanjing, where luckily I managed to borrow another twenty dollars from a friend of Lou Guohua. The whole area was devastated by war, and the weather freezing. Transport and communications had almost broken down completely. The story of how I got from Nanjing to Wuhan via Xuzhou and Zhengzhou on my twenty-two dollars is a very moving one. For the first time I experienced what it is like to be a beggar and a refugee. What I heard and saw in the course of my two-week journey completely revealed the reactionary way in which the Guomindang was leading the War of Resistance, and the tragic consequences that followed. Although such things are not without importance, this is not the place to talk about them, and, in any case, others with better qualifications to do so have already told the story of those tragic times.

When I arrived in Wuhan, after an absence of ten long years, it was already mid-December. Soon after getting there I read in the Wuhan press how General Tang Shengzhi had abandoned Nanjing after swearing that he would ‘stand or fall’ with it, and how Japanese soldiers had brutally put the city to the sword. Naturally these terrible events attracted my attention, but my most immediate problem was how to keep body and soul together. Even though I knew a number of my friends were living in Wuhan, I had no way of finding out their addresses. I walked the streets and hung around the ferry wharf in the hope that I might bump into someone I knew, but all to no avail. I slept two nights at the Dazhimen railway station in Hankou, without even the money for a crust of bread. On the morning of the third day, I sold my only remaining possession, a tooth-mug, to a stall-holder near the railway station. The sale brought me a few cents, which I used to pay for the ferry across the Yangtze to Lanka Hill in Wuchang. There I hoped to borrow some money from a professor at Wuhan University whom I knew from when we were at school together, although I would never have even thought of going to see him had I not been on the point of starving and freezing to death. After getting off the ferry, I went into a small restaurant to buy some noodles. Imagine my relief when in the restaurant I bumped into my old friend Li Zhongsan! Not only did he spare me the
embarrassment of begging from someone I could not stand, but he brought my entire eight-month nightmare to a close – a period which I can describe without hesitation as the most difficult in my life.

After treating me to a hearty meal, Li Zhongsan bought me a cotton-padded jacket and some other clothes. In the afternoon, he took me to Chen Duxiu’s home, where I stayed for nearly a fortnight. We talked together about many questions, some of which are worth recording in detail.

Chen Duxiu had been freed from jail three months earlier than I. Just before his release he had drafted some papers on the Anti-Japanese War.1 After being set free, he had sent them to the comrades in Shanghai, who found that they did not completely agree with them. It was about this time that Luo Han arrived in Nanjing. As soon as he read Chen’s papers he gave them his whole-hearted support; he even argued that we should use them as a platform for gathering together a broadly-based movement encompassing both Trotskyists and others opposed to Japan and the Guomindang. The first step would be to propose to the CCP that they co-operate with us. Chen Duxiu knew of Luo Han’s scheme, but did not encourage him in it. Luo Han, however, decided to take things into his own hands. He told Ye Jianying of his proposals, and Ye encouraged him to go to Yan’an to talk with Mao Zedong in person. Luo Han therefore left Nanjing for Xi’an, where he stayed at the house of Lin Boqu, also an old friend of his and the CCP representative in that city. Lin Boqu immediately transmitted Chen’s papers and Luo Han’s proposals for co-operation to Mao in Yan’an, by special messenger. Several days later, Mao’s reply came through, saying that, if Chen Duxiu admitted his past mistakes and renounced Trotskyism, he could then work together with the CCP. Naïve though dear old Luo Han was, he was never so naïve as to think that Chen Duxiu would agree to such conditions. His hopes dashed, he left Xi’an. His actions not only angered Chen Duxiu but were roundly criticised by the provisional leadership of the Trotskyist movement in Shanghai, and he quietly returned to Yixing to resume teaching pottery.

At the time, Chen Duxiu was extremely dissatisfied with the Trotskyist leadership in Shanghai. Feeling that their narrow sectarian approach would never get anywhere, he had decided not to go east but to move on to Wuhan instead. After the main battles in the Shanghai area had been fought and lost and the Guomindang armies along the Nanjing-Shanghai railway had collapsed in disarray, Wuhan had temporarily become the political and military centre of China and the new hotbed of the mass movement. All the social forces and political groupings stirred into being by the War of Resistance had converged

---

1 Since I no longer have these documents to hand, I cannot describe them in any detail.