From War to Revolution

Wang Fanxi


When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, there was a sudden surge of activity among the people of the occupied areas. I had never before seen such an abrupt and dramatic transformation in the mood of the masses after a long period of inactivity. Overnight, their mood changed from deep despair to exhilarated optimism, and, at the same speed, from optimism to angry dissatisfaction when they saw their hopes dashed by the Guomindang. Ever since the launching of the War of Resistance in 1937, we had been firmly convinced that a revolution was inevitable, that war was the mother of revolution. There was, therefore, an important difference between us and Chen Duxiu, and even between us and the ‘majority’ around Peng Shuzhi, since we stressed the need not only to prepare, but – even more importantly – to prepare ourselves for, the revolution. But, despite our firm conviction that the revolution was imminent, we found ourselves ideologically and organisationally unprepared for it when it actually broke out.

When the masses began to show their readiness to act, there was no strong revolutionary-Marxist party to give them shape and direction. The CCP had long since withdrawn its cadres from the cities of southeast China, and the various ‘democratic parties’ could do little more than show the flag. There was therefore a vacuum of revolutionary leadership. If the Chinese Trotskyist movement had had several hundred or, better still, several thousand basic cadres, I believe we would have been in a position to fill that vacuum. Even if the forces of the CCP had then re-entered the cities to dispute the leadership of the mass movement with us, we would not necessarily have suffered a smashing defeat; and even though they might still have ended up by winning control of the whole of China, at least the political situation in the Guomindang areas in the period from 1945 to 1949 would have gone down in history in a very different form.

But, although we were few, and weakened by the split, we successfully intervened with our small forces in the postwar movement, rapidly growing in strength and influence. This was mainly because the political situation in China favoured our position. Having suffered terribly during the eight years of war, everyone was eager for peace, but the ‘victorious’ Guomindang was
actively preparing a new all-out war against the Communists which rapidly led to economic crisis and ruin. People in the Guomindang-controlled areas, especially the students and the working masses, angrily rose up against the government around the slogans ‘no civil war’, ‘no dictatorship’, and ‘no starvation’. These slogans fitted in perfectly with the revolutionary-democratic programme for which the Chinese Trotskyist movement had been struggling for over fifteen years.

Shortly after the War, we in the Internationalist group began to edit a daily supplement to *Qianxian ribao* (Front-line Daily), a Shanghai newspaper whose chief editor was Huan Xiang (at the time of writing, Chinese Chargé d’Affaires in London). Everyone with any literary ability in our group was mobilised to write for it on militant themes. We achieved quite an impact among students and workers in Shanghai, and, for that reason, the Guomindang Department of Social Affairs in the city intervened after only a few weeks to silence us.

By this time, we were no longer publishing our mimeographed *Internationalist*. Now that new newspapers and periodicals were springing up on all sides, we decided to bring out a properly printed and openly distributed fortnightly of our own called *Xinqi* (New Banner). The first issue came out in July 1946. The main responsibility for writing and editing fell on Zheng Chaolin and myself. This meant that the two of us were under a great deal of strain. Just before the sixteenth issue appeared, the paper was banned by government-decree, so the news stands would not take it and our commercial printers refused to print it. Unwilling to bow to Guomindang pressure, we rigged up a printing press which though small (and similarly operated) was bigger than the one on which we had printed *Struggle*, and got two of our comrades to do the typesetting. We brought out a further six rather unattractive, hand-printed issues of *Xinqi*. Because of printing difficulties, the paper no longer appeared as regularly as before, so we switched our main efforts to books and pamphlets, publishing under the name *Xinqi Library*. As far as I remember, we brought out Zheng Chaolin’s *ABC of the Theory of Permanent Revolution*, his translation of Trotsky’s *The Permanent Revolution* and his abridged translation of Trotsky’s *My Life*. I put together an edition of Trotsky’s articles and letters on China, calling it *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*. We also brought out the photographic reprint, mentioned earlier, of the Chinese translation of Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*.

During the same period, the members of the ‘majority’ also resumed their publishing activities. At first, they brought out an academic periodical called *Qiuzhen* (Seeking the Truth), later joined by a smaller magazine initially called *Qingnian yu funü* (‘Youth and Women’) and afterwards renamed *Xinsheng*