The Communist League of China

Frank Glass (Li Furen)

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The following account reproduces pp. 9–20 of a report by Frank Glass found in the Trotsky Archive in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, where it bears the number T2.16872. Thanks are due to that body for permission to publish and make it available. The Niel Sih mentioned in the report is the pseudonym of Liu Renjing, Frank Glass’s main ally inside the Trotskyist movement, who was broken by torture in 1937 and joined the Guomindang, subsequently making his peace with Mao in 1949. The text was written after consultation with Harold Isaacs towards the end of 1939, and, according to the correspondence in the Houghton archive, was sent to Trotsky on 21 January. Source: Revolutionary History, vol. 2, no. 4, spring 1990.

And now to our movement in China. My information is valid only up to 1 September when I left Shanghai. Again, all factual information concerning our organisation is at best approximate. Even our own comrades vary considerably concerning such factual information as the number of comrades, and so on.

The Communist League of China was founded in 1931, about four years following the Shanghai coup d’état of Chiang Kai-shek in April 1927. Subsequent to the coup, revolutionaries who disassociated themselves from Stalinism formed several different groups. These groups were united and consolidated, thanks mainly to Comrade Graves [Frank Glass], who arrived from South Africa, in 1931 when the League was formally founded.

The present strength of our party is approximately 500 members throughout the country, of whom approximately half are active. The distribution is approximately as follows: 100 members at Shanghai, 100 members at Fuzhou, a port half-way between Shanghai and the British Crown Colony at Hong Kong, 100 members at Hong Kong and Kowloon, which are adjacent, 100 members in the Zhongshan district, which is in the Pearl River Delta in South China, and the balance scattered throughout China. Comrades differ in their estimation of our strength. Some put the figure at 500, others state that 200 is more accurate. The War has made it impossible to ascertain the correct picture.

The number of comrades does not give a precise indication of the influence of the movement. We have in China close sympathisers in many quarters, particularly in student and intellectual circles. This is reflected somewhat by
references in various publications to the Communist League and to the Fourth International.

The leaders of our party are all veteran revolutionists, many of whom were in the movement in China since 1921. Save for one member, I believe all members of the Central Committee have been in Guomindang jails. Among outstanding active comrades one might mention Comrade Wang Mingyuan [Wang Fanxi], who was a Left Oppositionist from the very beginning in Moscow, Comrade Peng Shuzhi, a original member of the CC of the CP of China, Comrade Chen [Zheng Chaolin] another original member of the CC of the CCP, Comrades Chen Qichang, Luo, and Han.

About 60 per cent of all comrades are workers; others are intellectuals or white-collar workers.

With minor exceptions, all the work of the party is illegal. Prior to August 1937, some 50 of our comrades, including Comrade Chen Duxiu, were in jail. All were released at various intervals up to the fall of Nanjing in December 1937. Prior to the War, our comrades were arrested on sight; two Central Committees were arrested en masse. These arrests were all made by the Guomindang or with the cooperation of the British or French police, as the case might be. In general, the Guomindang at present takes no active steps against our comrades unless they are participating in legal activity. The Guomindang threat against our comrades has, for the time being, abated.

In the two foreign areas of Shanghai, our comrades now have relative safety, but the British or French police will turn them over to the Japanese hangmen upon the demand of the latter without trial. Up to the time I left, none of our comrades had been arrested in Shanghai since the two preceding years.

The greatest danger in Shanghai, and elsewhere in China for that matter, at present lies in the GPU and Stalinists. Several of our comrades, including Comrades Peng and Graves, have been sent black-hand letters and warnings of one kind or another showing beyond any doubt a Stalinist or a GPU source. By linking the names in their press of our comrades with Japanese puppets, the Stalinists have in reality invited their assassination. Naturally, in Shanghai, our comrades take the greatest of precautions. Several, through fear of being recognised by Stalinists, live in complete hiding.

Recently, the Stalinists in Shanghai published a leaflet in Chinese entitled *The Crimes of the Trotskyists*. These ‘crimes’ included the usual stock charges, which have been rather well discredited by our party in bourgeois papers friendly to us. Unable to find any ‘crimes’, the Stalinists have resorted to personal slander and the pamphlet states, for example, that ‘almost all Trotskyites are homosexuals and hold orgies in bathhouses’. Another ‘crime’ is the accusation that