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Books

“Chinese Revolutionary”

- Reviews section -

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China, May 1937. A left-wing revolutionary is arrested by Kuomintang special agents. Dragged into an interrogation chamber, the special agents demand that he give them the addresses of a few of his comrades. Refusing to do so, he is smashed in the back of the head with a thick piece of wood. One figure, who seems to be the leader, evinces false concern and upbraids the people responsible for hitting the prisoner. Losing patience with the arrested revolutionary who continues to refuse to divulge the name or locations of any of his comrades, another savage beating ensues. The prisoner is tossed into a bare cell, bleeding from the head and ankles. Dragged out of his cell, a single question is asked: “Where does Ch’en Ch’i Ch’ang live?” [1] Ch’en Ch’i Ch’ang was a prominent leader of China’s Left Opposition, inspired by the Left Opposition in Russia associated with Leon Trotsky, who had been expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929. Saying nothing, “they started screaming at me like frenzied animals: Where does Ch’en Ch’i Ch’ang live? Where does Ch’en Ch’i Ch’ang live? Answer! Answer! Are you going to tell us?” [2] As the author of this memoir notes: “the days of ‘bourgeois democracy’ were well and truly over, and the ‘scientific’ policing techniques perfected by Stalin and Hitler and adopted by Chiang Kai-Shek were becoming more and more widely used...” [3] Taken from Shanghai to a small town over an hour’s drive from Nanking, the author is dumped at a detention centre, where he is subjected to months of solitary confinement. Japanese warplanes fly regularly overhead on their way to Nanking, rocking the centre with explosives. As the Japanese advanced, more and more guards begin to desert their posts “to escape the coming holocaust.” [4] One after another, prisoners were released, until the author was the only one left. Finally, he is released by the last remaining guard, walking in freezing weather to Nanking wearing little more than a ragged cotton shirt. Devastated by war, with transport and communications barely functioning, “for the first time I experienced what it is like to be a beggar and a refugee.” [Ibid p. 204]] Arriving in Wuhan, the author takes a ferry across the Yangtse, and bumps into an old friend in a small restaurant. The friend takes him to the home of Ch’en Tu-hsiu, China’s pre-eminent revolutionary intellectual. Ch’en Tu-hsiu was not just a central figure of the May Fourth movement, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party – expelled for his sympathies for the Left Opposition in Russia – and the grand old man of Chinese Marxism. He was also a mentor and comrade of Wang Fan-Hsi, a leading militant of China’s Left Opposition, whose extraordinary life is recounted in this gripping memoir.

The tale of Wang Fan-Hsi’s life is very much a tale of China in the twentieth century, especially the early to middle period of that century. [5] It begins with Fan-Hsi’s recollections of Hsia-shih, the town of around 30,000 inhabitants living on the railway line between Shanghai and Hangchow, “a strange mixture of backwardness and enlightenment” where Fan-Hsi was born. [6] The 1919 May Fourth Movement was the first political movement to catch the young Fan-Hsi’s attention. Though wide in scope, it consisted primarily of Peking students going on strike and demonstrating en masse against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which included the decision to hand over Shantung Province, formerly held by Germany, to Japan. It also sparked a political and intellectual ferment, awakening Chinese intellectuals of the need for change in China, for science and democracy. This movement was spearheaded by Ch’en Tu-hsiu among many others, and it profoundly influenced a twelve year old Fan-Hsi. He remembers that “we greedily devoured Ch’en Tu-hsiu’s and Hu Shih’s articles on the literary revolution, Chou Tso-jen’s essays, and the poems in modern Chinese by Liu Pan-nung and others... we were especially fond of hearing them talk about their lives as students and the struggle in Hangchow. It was not long before we began to experiment with new activities inside our own school: we set up a school council, ran our first library, subscribed to newspapers and magazines from Shanghai and Hangchow, wrote out our own school newspaper by hand and pasted it up on the school wall.” [7] The immense idealism engendered by the May Fourth Movement intermingled with Fan-Hsi’s inborn idealism, nourished by novels of heroism and tales from a great uncle who regaled the young Fan-Hsi with stories about the great uncle’s father’s adventures fighting for the Taipings in the Taiping rebellion. A

year ”or so of education in the spirit of the May Fourth Movement had turned me into a high-flying idealist...” [8] As Fan-Hsi continued his school years, he was exposed to an ever greater and wider variety of influences from literature, science, and philosophy, ranging from modern thinkers like Bertrand Russell and John Dewey, to ancient thinkers like Socrates and Plato. Fan-Hsi came under the influence of an organisation called “The Creation Society” which espoused “art for art’s sake” at age eighteen. Fan-Hsi at this time believed strongly in “study for study’s sake”, and felt that “the pursuit of politics and the search for knowledge were mutually exclusive. I had chosen the latter, and intended to devote myself heart and soul to research.” [9] These views reflected a differentiation taking place within the main current of ideas informing the May Fourth Movement. *New Youth*, the name of an influential magazine founded by Ch’en Tu-hsiu in 1915, suffered a split between Tu-hsiu and Hu Shi, another leading figure associated with the magazine. They parted company and went their separate ways. As Fan-Hsi puts it, “the former advanced towards Marxism, while the latter remained stuck at the bourgeois-democratic stage. The former made the leap from thought into action, and from the literary to the political revolution; the latter wanted to conserve the ‘purity’ of ideology, and was opposed to scholars sullyng themselves with politics. Ch’en Tu-hsiu, Li Ta-chao, and others had set up the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, and made an alliance with the revolutionary nationalist Sun Yat-Sen and his Kuomintang in the south; Hu Shih and others had joined Liang Ch’i-ch’ao’s ‘study clique’ which based its political hopes with the warlord government in the north.” [10] Fan-Hsi began to question his viewpoint when the May Thirtieth Movement broke out just before his graduation from middle school. On 30 May 1925, “Shanghai students staged a mass demonstration in support of workers on strike at a Japanese cotton mill. While marching into the city centre they were fired on by British police. Several died and still more were wounded. As a result a furious anti-imperialist movement swept first Shanghai and then the rest of China.” [11] Radicalised, Fan-Hsi went over completely to the left-wing positions of Ch’en Tu-hsiu.

Graduating from middle school, Fan-Hsi took and passed the entrance exam for Peking University, which thrilled him and fulfilled one of his most cherished dreams. Fan-Hsi provides an evocative description of university life that is worth reproducing in full: “The Han Gardens and the Horse Spirit Temple area where the university was located could be compared in some ways to the Montmartre district of Paris. Apart from university students, all sorts of young intellectuals lived there. Most of them were very poor, interested in letters and disdainful of all conventions. The people one came across in the street were usually carrying weighty books under their arms or holding the latest issue of some periodical. They seldom bothered to comb their hair, and dressed untidily in long blue gowns and worn-out shoes or sandals. Only a few of them wore Western-style clothes. The hotels and cheap restaurants were full of every kind of aspiring scholar, artist, and rebel, chatting away in a mixture of dialects. For a long time I had been attracted by the romanticism of the Creation Society, and I had a weak spot for this sort of Bohemian existence. The world I now found myself in was in many ways an embodiment of my long-cherished dreams, and I was naturally very happy.” [12] While thoroughly enjoying and immersing himself in art and literature with great enthusiasm, and exhilarated by contributing to famous publications and having discussions with literary groups, Fan-Hsi soon faced financial problems and a big distraction. Shortly after enrolling at the university, he had joined the underground Communist Party. More and more he found himself working for the revolution, and lacked the time to dabble in the literature he so enjoyed. Furthermore, great events were on the horizon.

China was rocked in the years 1925-1927 by revolution and counterrevolution, which would shatter the alliance between the Nationalists – the Kuomintang (KMT) – and the Chinese Communist Party. At the time the alliance was formed, the Kuomintang was a heterogeneous and broad organisation with both a left and a right wing, sharing nationalist aspirations. Many radicals joined it, and as late as 1924, Sun Yat-Sen, the most prominent and influential Chinese nationalist and republican leader, stated that the ultimate goal of his famous “Three Principles of the People”, which championed nationalism, democracy and socialism, was “communism and anarchism.” [13] When Sun Yat-Sen died in 1925, his loss deprived the CCP-KMT alliance of “a prestigious leader whose main quality was his ability to create unity by seeking common ground among people of disparate views.” [14] When a national government was established in Canton in 1925, rivalling the warlord regime in Peking (China at this time suffered from warlordism, imperialist exploitation, and national division) a crusade was launched. Called the Northern Expedition, it was a military campaign against the warlords of central and North China led by a certain general by the name of Chiang Kai-Shek, aiming to unite the country under a single national government. However the Northern

Expedition, which began not long after the May Thirtieth Movement, was far more than a military campaign, and stirred the passions of the masses. They took the leading role in the movement for national unity. As Trotsky explained: “In the strikes, agrarian uprisings and military expeditions of 1925-27 a new China was born. While the generals, tied to their own and foreign bourgeoisie, could only tear the country to pieces, the Chinese workers became the standard-bearers of an irresistible urge to national unity.” [15] Keen to get involved in the struggles breaking out, Fan-Hsi headed for Canton. By the time he arrived the Northern Expedition had already passed through, with political power in the city effectively in the hands of General Li Chi-shen, a member of the right wing of the Kuomintang and very close to Chiang Kai-shek. But the Left in Canton was very strong and was able to insist on being treated as an equal to the Nationalist government there. Fan-Hsi recalls exploring the city: “As soon as I got settled in I went on a tour of the bookstores...everywhere I looked there were all kinds of revolutionary newspapers, and the sight of them made me feel quite dizzy. I came across the communist *New Youth* for the first time...wherever one looked there were piles of books with words like...â€˜Marx’ printed in bold characters on the covers. Ten days before, we only dared to mention such words in whispers behind closed doors.” [16] Fan-Hsi came across the strike committee of the Canton-Hong Kong general strike, headquartered in Canton, which rivalled the authority of the Kuomintang administration in Canton in a situation of dual power. Fan-Hsi was extremely impressed by the strike committee, which had its own militia and enormous strikers’ canteens, whose influence “[was] to be seen everywhere... I paid a visit to the communal canteen, which was capable of seating several hundred workers at a time, and I took part in lively mass meetings of the strikers. I remember vividly to this day the activities of the local strike-committee branches in Canton. In each branch there was a long table covered with red cloth, and on the walls were the pictures of revolutionary leaders framed in red. Sometimes there were groups of workers sitting around these tables discussing political issues of the day; at other times they would arbitrate on the disputes that arose between local workers and employers... I was amazed to see how knowledgeable and capable the Canton workers were...” [17]

The Chinese Revolution was also the setting for the final showdown between Trotsky and Stalin. Trotsky vigorously condemned and criticised the policies which Stalin and the Comintern prescribed for China. The main substance of Trotsky’s criticism consisted of opposing the policy whereby the CCP subordinated itself and its activities to the KMT in the name of uniting “all the progressive forces in the country” into an alliance to achieve Chinese independence and freedom from imperialist domination and oppression. [18] While the KMT did have a left wing, the fact of the matter was, as socialist historian Duncan Hallas points out, the Kuomintang “were bourgeois nationalists, with innumerable family ties among merchants, capitalists and land-owners, groups which in China were closely intertwined. Workers’ power and peasant revolt were as frightening to them as to the foreign bosses of Jardine Matheson and the Shanghai and Hong Kong Bank.” [19] Victor Serge – well described by Peter Sedgwick as having been “an anarchist, a Bolshevik, a Trotskyist, a revisionist Marxist, and, on his own confession, a â€˜personalist’ ” [20] – and also at this time part of the Left Opposition in Russia – remembers that, initially, “the Chinese Revolution galvanised us all. I have the feeling of a positive wave of enthusiasm stirring up the whole Soviet world – or at least the thinking part of it.” [21] A shocking crime was to change the balance of forces in China. Serge conveys it best: “When he arrived before Shanghai, Chiang Kai-shek found the town in the hands of the trade unions, whose rebellion had been superlatively organised... Day by day we followed the preparation of the military coup, whose only possible outcome was the massacre of the Shanghai proletariat. Zinoviev, Trotsky, and Radek demanded an immediate change of line from the Central Committee. It would have been enough to send the Shanghai Committee a telegram: â€˜Defend yourselves if you have to!’ and the Chinese Revolution would not have been beheaded. One divisional commander put his troops at the disposal of the Communist Party to resist the disarmament of the workers. But the Politburo insisted on the subordination of the Communist Party to the Kuomintang.” [22] A bloody massacre was the result. While Chiang Kai-Shek’s turn against the Left and the working class surprised many, it was not unanticipated. Trotsky provides a good analysis: “Patriotism has been throughout all history inseparably bound up with power and property. In the face of danger the ruling classes have never stopped short of dismembering their own country so long as they were able in this way to preserve power over one part of it. It is not at all surprising, therefore, if the Chinese bourgeoisie, represented by Chiang Kai-Shek, turned its weapons in 1927 against the proletariat, the standard-bearer of national unity.” [23] At a speech in a party cell in Moscow, Serge “ended my five minutes by flinging out a sentence that brought an icy silence: â€˜The prestige of the General Secretary is infinitely more precious to him than the blood of the Chinese proletariat!’ The hysterical section of the audience exploded:

“‘Enemies of the Party!’” [24] This is an example of the dramatic degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the extreme authoritarianism that had triumphed, soon to be eclipsed by Stalinist totalitarianism. Meanwhile in China, Fan-Hsi made his way to Shanghai and observed the desolation of the city after the slaughter: “In the Old West Gate area... there was hardly a soul to be seen on the streets, and it was if one could actually feel the fear and smell the blood which had recently been shed there. Attempts had been made to paint out the slogans on the walls, but it was still possible to make out the message they carried: ‘Down with imperialism’, ‘Down with Chiang Kai-shek’, ‘Oppose the White terror.’” [25]

Wuhan stood in stark contrast to what had happened in Shanghai: “Red banners bearing slogans welcoming the convocation of the All-China Conference of the Confederation of Labour were strung across the streets, and fluttering proudly in the breeze. We were almost moved to tears... there were slogans in huge characters painted on the walls of all the big buildings, with quotations from leaders of the Russian revolution...” [26] Despite the monstrous actions of Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai, he did not yet speak for the whole KMT and nor did the whole party fall into line behind his banner, as there was still a Left in the KMT, even as space for dissent narrowed. Fan-Hsi had direct experience of working with the KMT Left: “on the surface...our relations with the so-called left wing of the Kuomintang were closer than they had been with Chiang Kai-shek... the Wuhan government appeared to rely greatly on... the support of the Communist Party. But the situation was worsening, and even we lower-level cadres could clearly see that the revolution was reaching a crisis.” [27] Fan-Hsi’s lack of faith in the “left-wing” of the Kuomintang was confirmed by the most obvious method – being thrown in jail. Eventually, with the help of friends and comrades, he was released. However, with the counter-revolution in full swing, Wuhan had become a dangerous place for a radical. Fan-Hsi took a boat out of Wuhan with other left-wingers, the former foreign minister of the Wuhan Government, and even Sun Yat-sen’s widow, Soong Ch’ing-ling. Fan-Hsi evocatively describes the euphoria of successfully escaping Wuhan: “As soon as the ship had sailed out of the Huangp’u River, we crawled out from the hold and onto the deck. It was like being born again. The early autumn sun lifted our spirits, and we began to dance for joy and sing the Internationale. We sailed further and further out to sea, gradually losing sight of the shores of the motherland. The water was like glass and our mood changed to one of meditation. We leant against the railings and gazed pensively into the distance, while thoughts flooded in. As individuals we were each beginning a new chapter in our lives, and it seemed to us as if the Chinese Revolution was also beginning a new chapter... One month before the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, we arrived in Moscow.” [28]

Arriving in Moscow, Fan-Hsi and his fellow comrades were largely unaware of the internal struggles going on between Stalin and the Left Opposition, but hints and comments from a number of Russians gave them a vague idea of what was happening. A few dozen Chinese students were selected to do a two-year course at the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KUTV). KUTV “was a political university which specialised in training revolutionary cadres for the countries of the East. It recruited students from over seventy nationalities, including the minority nationalities of the eastern part of the Soviet Union and the oppressed nations of Africa and Asia. There were also some Japanese and black American students.” [29] Growing increasingly interested in what was going on, Fan-Hsi and the other Chinese students got their hands onto the documents of the Left Opposition, so as to understand what exactly was being attacked and denounced by the party members who taught at KUTV. Fan-Hsi found what was said by the Left Opposition as revelatory, and describes his agreement with the Left Opposition, especially on the controversial questions of the Chinese revolution, as “instinctive.” [30] After the ceremonies on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution – “a celebration of the victory of Stalinist reaction” - the factional struggle consuming the party became more and more heated at the university. [31] The persecution of the Opposition escalated considerably. Oppositionists “were now dealt with by administrative means, harassed by the police and the GPU, driven out of the party en masse, sacked from their jobs, and denied civil rights. We frequently heard of Oppositionists being physically beaten.” [32] Chinese students were especially worried, because they had set up a secret Oppositionist organisation which supported Trotsky, and by 1929 the Oppositionists accounted for half of all the Chinese students. In the KUTV library, Fan-Hsi translated from Russian into Chinese documents of the Opposition, hiding them in a big volume of *Capital* when necessary. Links were established with the Russian Opposition through a man called Poliakov, who invited Fan-Hsi to use his apartment as a safe space to translate Opposition documents. One day on his way to Poliakov’s flat, Fan-Hsi bumped into Mrs Poliakov. Noticing that she

had been crying, “we stopped at a corner of the street, where she told me that Poliakov had been arrested after leading a strike at his factory... she dared not stay too long, so she shook hands with me, pulled her shawl back over her head again, and walked off, after we had wished each other good luck. This was the first time I had witnessed the persecution of a family of revolutionaries by the Stalinist secret police...” [33] At a meeting of the clandestine committee of the Chinese student Opposition, it was decided that Fan-Hsi should return to China, as he had come under suspicion of being involved with the Opposition, and would never return home again if he was discovered.

Back in China, Fan-Hsi spent time working under Chou En-lai, doing as much useful Oppositionist work as he could under difficult conditions. The situation in the CCP, as he explains, “could not be compared with that in the Soviet Party, where the choice between the two factions might be between the Kremlin or Siberia; but even in China it was an unpleasant experience to be an Oppositionist. We had no funds of our own and no external source of finance. As if earning a living was not hard enough, we had to put money aside regularly to finance the work of our organisation.” [34] Ch'en Tu-hsiu, who had been removed as General Secretary of the CCP, was denounced and took the blame for the debacle of 1927 by Stalin and his allies. However, he had got hold of documents of the Opposition and found himself in profound agreement with the views of Trotsky. When this became known, it greatly alarmed Stalin, who “naturally feared the possible repercussions in the international Communist movement of so important a figure as Ch'en going over to the Opposition.” [35] Ch'en Tu-hsiu was officially expelled from the Party on 15 November 1929, responding to his expulsion on the 10 December with his “Open Letter to All Comrades”. Ch'en Tu-hsiu's conversion “provoked a serious crisis in the ranks of the Party. Adherents... were found everywhere – in the Central Committee, the Provincial Committees, the Party branches, the Communist Youth League, and in the mass organisations. A systematic purge was carried out at all levels of the movement, and every week the Party journal, *Red Flag*, published lists of the names of those who had been expelled.” [36] Soon after this, the clandestine Oppositionist organisation among the Chinese students was discovered in Moscow. Sun Yat-Sen University was closed down, and the Chinese students were arrested, interrogated, and sent to labour camps in the Arctic Circle. For refusing to admit they had done anything wrong, the Chinese students “were sent to serve long sentences in Siberian labour camps and prisons. The only news we ever heard of these comrades was from a Yugoslav Communist by the name of Anton Ciliga... according to Ciliga's articles about his prison experiences, Communists with yellow skins received far worse treatment than their white fellow-prisoners.” [37] From confessions extorted from the Chinese students, Moscow learned that more than thirty Oppositionists had returned to China, and Fan-Hsi's name was on the list. While Fan-Hsi was ill in hospital, Chou En-lai visited him and told him to think of his future, and write a statement denouncing Trotskyism, to be published in *Red Flag*. Refusing, Fan-Hsi left the hospital and a few days later, “the announcement of my expulsion appeared in *Red Flag* alongside that of Wu Chi-hsien, editor of the Party's theoretical organ *Bolshevik* right up to the moment of his expulsion.” [38] Five years of membership in the Party was over. Various Chinese Oppositionist groups unified into the Chinese Left Opposition in 1931, with Tu-hsiu elected General Secretary, and Fan-Hsi put in charge of the theoretical publication. Spirits were high – “Lo Han drafted a telegram to Trotsky joyfully announcing that the Chinese comrades had taken a step of great significance... the tone of this message reflected our boundless confidence... a struggle for democracy was beginning at all levels of society, just as Trotsky had forecast. We therefore decided to launch a nationwide campaign for a genuine constituent assembly.” [39] Meanwhile, the CCP underwent a severe degeneration as it was completely Stalinised, and Mao began his rise to power within the Party, primarily by acting in the most dishonest, dissembling, and reactionary way. For example, when Mao took control of the Red Army in Jiangxi, “he had thousands of peasants and Communists denounced as nationalist spies in order to justify a brutal purge to consolidate his power. His atrocities provoked a mutiny. The rebels appealed to the party HQ in Shanghai, saying Mao was not a Bolshevik, and his ambition was to ‘become Party Emperor.’ But Chou En-lai in Shanghai backed Mao, giving him the signal to torture and execute the mutineers. Following the terror, Mao proclaimed his first ‘Red’ state with its capital in Ruijin in November 1931. He proceeded to build a totalitarian bureaucracy by squeezing the peasants and purging ‘class enemies’, who provided an army of slave labourers. Around 700,000 people died as a result of terror and suicide.” [40] This tale of woe would only continue and get worse. Much worse. Ultimate power in the Party for Mao was still some years off, however.

The first significant impact the Chinese Left Opposition had was not narrowly political, but also cultural. This was on the socialist cultural movement in Shanghai. In the city, a number of publishing houses had links with the

Oppositionists, who brought out works by Marx, Engels, and Kropotkin, translated Trotsky's *My Life*, and histories of the European revolutionary movement. Hong Kong was an early and strong base of the Left Opposition. Many workers there “had been part of the organisation, but over the years most of them had lost contact with the centre, as a result of the repeated arrest of leading members in Shanghai and elsewhere.” [41] In May 1936 Fan-Hsi headed to Hong Kong to re-establish contact with the comrades, publishing a paper and turning all their efforts towards organising workers. These included such outstanding comrades as Ch'en Chung-hsi, who was later killed leading a guerrilla unit in the War of Resistance against Japan, which had invaded China. While a number of Left Oppositionists threw themselves into the War of Resistance, such as Wang Ch'ang-yao and his wife Chang San-chieh, “who led a guerrilla column some two thousand strong in Shantung which was eventually destroyed by a CCP attack from the rear during an engagement with the Japanese”, the Chinese Left Opposition ultimately failed to sufficiently participate in the military resistance. [42] As it was, they faced extreme dangers not only from the Japanese military, for they also had to worry about the Kuomintang and the CCP, who sought to annihilate them just as surely as the Japanese. As the War of Resistance spilled over into the Second World War, the Chinese Trotskyist organisation split in 1941, over “how to characterise the War of Resistance and what attitude we should adopt towards it should China be drawn into the wider international conflict; and, later, organisational problems in relation to the status and rights of the minorities in the Party.” [43] Without going into great detail about this dispute, Fan-Hsi does have this to say: “It seems to me... that the concept of the rights of factions and minorities within the Party to exist and advance their views retains its force and is of enormous significance not only for Trotskyists but for the revolutionary socialist movement as a whole.” [44] On this there is no doubt that Fan-Hsi is correct.

In the aftermath of the War of Resistance and the Second World War, China was devastated. The suffering and loss of life had been immense. The alliance between the Kuomintang and the CCP, who had collaborated together against the Japanese, collapsed, and open civil war ensued. Chinese Trotskyists were imprisoned and murdered in both Kuomintang and CCP controlled areas. In “the Kuomintang areas... Trotskyist workers in the arsenal and other factories were arrested and some, including Wang Shu-pen... were imprisoned and murdered in the notorious Hsi-feng concentration camp in Kweichow province. In the areas controlled by the CCP... Trotskyists... were brutally persecuted and eventually murdered.” [45] Despite this persecution and the split, the revolutionary socialists in China enjoyed a modest growth. Far too soon, this was brought to an end by the victory of the CCP over the Kuomintang in 1949. Fan-Hsi was firmly of the opinion that “had the rise of the revolutionary mass movement among the students and urban poor not been interrupted and brought under control by the unexpectedly rapid military victory of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese section of the Fourth International might have grown into a powerful political force.” [46] Alas, it was not to be, and the organisation Fan-Hsi belonged to, the Internationalist Workers Party, was forced to make its most difficult decision – to stay or leave China? Ultimately they decided to stay, not because “we had the slightest illusions about the... CCP or were unaware how easily the CCP's system of mass-based political surveillance could crush our small organisation. It was based on the simple conviction that it was better for a revolutionary organisation of the working class to go down fighting than to quit the field without a contest.” [47] And before the nationwide round-up of Trotskyists in December 1952, the revolutionary socialists managed to bring out a journal, and lead strikes. One comrade in Canton, Lin Huan-hua, was even a leader of the Kwangtung Print-Workers Union. [48] Fan-Hsi escaped the round up because he had been chosen to man the co-ordinating centre of the organisation, and left Shanghai, although he retreated to his “safe place] with great reluctance. His links were severed with the movement by the raids, and those caught were imprisoned, sent to labour camps, or simply executed. Zheng Chaolin, one of Fan-Hsi's comrades, spent thirty years behind bars, first under the Kuomintang and then the CCP. He was declared a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International in 1979, and released the same year. [49] As for Fan-Hsi himself, after being forced to leave Hong Kong in late November 1949, “I lived in a peninsula of seven square miles extent on the south China coast until March 1975, when through the help of friends I managed to find my way to Europe.” [50] Fan-Hsi continued to cast his critical eye over the major events occurring in China, as did many of his surviving comrades and fellow exiles. [51] In 1968, Hong Kong youth, Fan-Hsi notes proudly, “began seriously to raise their efforts for personal success to the level of struggle for the betterment of society as a whole, of China, and of mankind. They began both to feel a deep hatred for the capitalist world and to deplore the bureaucratic regime of the CCP..” [52] A very positive development from Fan-Hsi's point of view. Fan-Hsi's ideas have attracted sympathy from figures as varied as the philosopher Wang Ruoshui, party critic Liu Binyan, the woman dissident Dai Qing, and former political prisoner Wang Xizhe. [53] After spending the greater part

of his life's efforts in the struggle for socialism and against Stalinism, Fan-Hsi died in 2002 in England.

Looking back, it is clear that, as author Gregor Benton elucidates, “through their advocacy of ... socialist democracy, and internationalism, the Trotskyists in China kept alive a tradition which the Maoists had long since abandoned: the new democratic, humanist, and universalist values of May Fourth.”[*Chinese Revolutionary*, p. xix.]] It was they, not the Maoists, who remained true to the original principles of the CCP. Its founders “had stepped out of the New Culture Movement of the late 1910s, which campaigned for enlightenment, democracy, women's liberation, social justice, internationalism and the resolution of China's crisis of sovereignty. Its first General Secretary, Chen Duxiu, pioneered China's democracy movement in the early twentieth century. In the 1920s, the humanist and universalist values for which he stood continued to inspire the party. In 1929...he was expelled as a Trotskyist. At the time of his expulsion, he reminded the other party leaders that ‘democracy is a necessary instrument for any class that seeks to win the majority to its side’ and warned against the suppression of dissident viewpoints’.” [54] One limitation to Fan-Hsi's memoir is that he skims over the influence of anarchism in China, which was the dominant radical current until the early 1920s. This is partly understandable, as anarchism in China had entered into a steep decline when Fan-Hsi became involved in political life, but it had a lingering influence. The positive legacy of the Chinese anarchists is well worth remembering and acknowledging, as it can only enrich other radical-democratic leftist viewpoints. The important anarchist communist and disciple of Kropotkin, Shifu, “championed syndicalism, and his circles pioneered unionism. By 1917, anarchists and syndicalists had founded the first modern labour unions in China, organising at least forty unions in the Canton area by 1921.” [55] They were even part of the early Communist movement, like the Beijing Communist nucleus, “to which anarchists were initially admitted, even editing the group's journal.” [56] The Chinese Trotskyists carried with them much of the best in the experience of the Russian Revolution, the early Communist movement, and the Chinese anarchists who paved the way for left-wing radicalism to enjoy a mass presence in China. [57]

With China's internal security budget exceeding military spending since 2010, China's ruling elite are clearly worried about increasing opposition to one-party rule. [58] The consequences of the extreme exploitation taking place in China, on the part of the big bureaucrats and big capitalists – often one and the same thing in China – is generating a growing resentment over the vast inequality gripping contemporary China. One example of this inequality is amply illustrated by the average net worth of the 83 delegates to the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Consultative Conference held in 2013. This was “3.35 billion... compared with the average wage for urban workers of less than \$7,000 per year.” [59] Quite what this rogue's gallery of billionaire bureaucrats and exploiters has to do with socialism, democracy, a classless society, and human freedom, is obviously a near impossible fiction to maintain inside and outside China. That is, unless socialism is redefined to mean an authoritarian capitalist state with a Stalinist political structure, instead of being “an economic system based upon conscious planning by associated producers” [60] where social organisation is based on “a free federation of producers' and consumers” communes”[*Ibid.*] and in which “the principle of satisfaction of needs for everyone would apply”. [61] For their longstanding and consistent defence of democracy, justice, human dignity and social emancipation, the Chinese Trotskyists, alongside all the other democratic radicals in Chinese history, will continue to serve as an example and an alternative. Their guiding star was a vision of a libertarian, democratic and humane society - a co-operative commonwealth in which all can freely and fully develop as self-determining human beings. Wang Fan-Hsi's hopes and dreams did not die with him, but continue to powerfully resonate and live on today.

[1] Wang Fan-Hsi, *Chinese Revolutionary*, (Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 192.

[2] *Ibid* p.193

[3] *Ibid*, p. 193-4.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 202.

[5] Wang Fan-Hsi 16 March 1907 – 30 December 2002.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 1.

[7] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[8] *Ibid*, p. 4.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 6-7.

[10] *Ibid*, p. 10.

[11] *Ibid*, p. 5.

[12] *Ibid*, p. 15-16.

[13] Andrew Flood, “Towards an anarchist history of the Chinese Revolution”, [Anarkismo, 2010.](#)

[14] Louis Heren, C.P. Fitzgerald, Michael Freeberne, Brian Hook, David Bonavia, *China's Three Thousand Years: The Story of a Great Civilisation*, (London: Times Newspapers Limited, 1973) p. 184.

[15] Kunal Chattopadhyay & Paul Le Blanc, *Writings in Exile*, (London: Pluto Press, 2012) p. 162

[16] *Ibid*, p. 21-22.

[17] *Ibid*, p. 26.

[18] Feiyi Zhang, *Solidarity*, 2012, [“1927: When China's workers challenged for power”](#).

[19] *Ibid*

[20] Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013) p. xxiii

[21] *Ibid* p. 252.

[22] *Ibid* p;253

[23] *Writings in Exile*, p. 163.

[24] *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 254.

[25] *Chinese Revolutionary*, p. 34.

[26] *Ibid*, p. 34.

[27] *Ibid*, p. 35-36.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 43.

[29] *Ibid*, p. 47.

[30] *Ibid*, p. 51.

[31] *Ibid*, p. 55.

[32] *Ibid*, p. 56-57.

[33] *Ibid*, p. 79.

[34] *Ibid*, p. 125.

[35] *Ibid*, p. 123.

[36] *Ibid*, p. 125.

[37] *Ibid*, p. 129.

[38] *Ibid*, p. 130.

[39] *Ibid*, p. 150.

[40] Mike Kyriazopolous, [“A short history of Maoism”](#), *Workers Liberty*, 2013.

[41] *Chinese Revolutionary* p.177.

[42] *Ibid*, p. 214.

[43] *Ibid*, p. 233.

[44] *Ibid*, p. 236.

[45] *Ibid*, p. 245.

[46] *Ibid*, p. 250.

[47] *Ibid*, p. 251.

[48] *Ibid*, p. 252

[49] Wang Fanxi, [“In Memory of a Chinese Revolutionary: Zheng Chaolin, 1901-1908”](#), *Against the Current*, 1998,

[50] *Chinese Revolutionary* p. 259

[51] See, for example, “A Criticism of the Various Views Supporting the Chinese Rural People’s Communes’ by Peng Shu-tse. For more critical Marxist analysis on the Chinese Communes, see the articles by Tony Cliff. For an example of a contemporary commune in China, see this BBC report, [“Life in one of China’s last communes”](#).

[52] *Chinese Revolutionary* p. 260

[53] Gregor Benton, Pierre Rousset, [“Wang Fanxi 1907-2002”](#), *International Viewpoint*, 2003,

[54] Gregor Benton and Lin Chun, [“Was Mao Really a Monster?”](#) *China Study Group*, 2009.

[55] Michael Schmidt and Lucien Van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2009) p. 168.

[56] *Black Flame*, p. 168.

[57] For more on the influence of anarchism on Chinese left-wing radicalism, see *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* by Arif Dirlik, and *The Origins of Chinese Communism*, also by Dirlik.

[58] Vincent Kolo, [“New leadership rejects democratisation”](#).

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Ernest Mandel, [“Marx and Engels on the Economy of Post-Capitalist Societies”](#), *International Viewpoint*.

[61] Ernest Mandel, [“Communism”](#), *International Viewpoint*, 2003.