

cc Jack, M-A, Gus, Steve, Dan D.

Report on the release of Chinese Trotskyists 9/10/79

According to information received by Peng, twenty-four imprisoned Chinese Trotskyists have been released, in three cities: 12 in Shanghai, 6 in Canton, and 6 in Wenchow in Chekiang province. Peng showed me xerox copies of personal letters from one of the prisoners written after his release completely confirming the earlier reports. Peng suggested that this information be treated confidentially and not fully reported in the press so as not to invite new restrictions on the released comrades' freedom.

Zheng Chaolin (Cheng Ch'ao-lin), the best-known leader of the imprisoned comrades, was held in solitary confinement in one room from the time of his arrest in December 1952 until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. He was allowed no visitors. During those fourteen years he wrote some 1 million characters in memoirs, articles, and poems. All of his papers were seized during the cultural revolution and the conditions of his imprisonment became worse. Around 1971 or 1972 Chou En-lai interceded on his behalf and he was transferred to house arrest. His wife, who had been at liberty after serving a five-year sentence, 1952-57, was allowed to join him (her real name is Liu Jingjen (Liu Ching-chen), but she is known by her pen-name, Wu Jingru (Wu Ching-ju)). Zheng was given work doing anonymous translations of foreign works, but was not permitted to write letters. On his release in the first week of June 1979 he and Wu were given an apartment in Shanghai. Zheng was informed that he was being given an amnesty, not a rehabilitation (i.e., Trotskyism is still regarded as a criminal offense, and the first report that Zheng had been declared "not guilty" was mistaken). Zheng was given a job as a member of the Literature and History Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference, the "advisory government" set up by the Chinese CP as a means of giving jobs and nominal posts to non-CCP political figures. Zheng has been asked to write his memoirs and some articles on the early history of the CCP. He has been given an adequate wage (about that of a skilled worker), but privately expresses doubts that the political climate has reached the point where anything he would write could actually be published in China. Wu Jingru is now completely blind and Cheng devotes much of his energy to taking care of her.

In addition to Zheng Chaolin (Wu Jingru is not counted as a prisoner), eleven other comrades were released in Shanghai. One is named Jiang Zhendong (Chiang Chen-tung), a worker comrade about ten years younger than Zheng Chaolin, who joined the CCP in the 1920s. For two others we have only their last names:

Chen (Ch'en) and Yu (YU).

In Canton, of the six released we have the name on one: Liu Xiu (Liu Hsiu), a member of the Trotskyist movement since about 1939. He has been given a job at about 60 yuan a month (US\$31), an average wage for an industrial worker. He is said to be in good spirits.

Of the six comrades released in Wenchow, we have the names of two: Wang Guolong (Wang Kuo-lung), who joined the Trotskyist movement in 1930 and was active in Shanghai, and Zhou ~~RENREN~~ Rensheng (Chou Jen-sheng).

As far as public announcements are concerned, the releases have been reported in the following publications:

Amnesty International Newsletter, August 1979. A two paragraph article mentions only Zheng Chaolin and his wife (it does not give her name) and that they are living in Shanghai after their release in early June. It does not say that any others were also released.

Vrij Nederland, August 18, 1979. An article by Gregor Benton reports the release of Zheng Chaolin and Wu Jingru, mentioning the figure of 8 total, all in Shanghai, and repeating the first report of a "not guilty" decision.

In addition I have received copies of a "Statement by Chinese Trotskyists Overseas on the CCP's Release of Zheng Chaolin and Other Trotskyist Political Prisoners," drafted by Wang Fan-hsi and not yet published anywhere; also: a second article by Gregor Benton, entitled "New Moved on Trotskyists in China" which has some more information than the Vrij Nederland piece and more background on Zheng, but was also written at the point when only 8 releases, all in Shanghai, were known. I do not know if this has been published anywhere.

--Les Evans