

The Struggle for the Control of the Red Army in Jiangxi: Mao vs. Zhou Enlai

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By 1929, after his triumph over Trotsky and the left and right opposition in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Stalin stood alone at the head of the all-powerful Russian State machine and the Comintern. The period starting with 1930 saw the elimination, around the world, of communist leaders whose positions were not directly derived from Stalin's own authority.¹ In this context of Stalin's takeover of the world communist movement, a group of Chinese students from Moscow's Sun Yat-sen University, led by Chen Shaoyu, Qin Bangxian and Zhang Wentian, went to Shanghai in the summer of 1930, with the undissimulated task of seizing control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Aided by Pavel Mif, director of the Chinese section in the Comintern's Far Eastern Department, who went with them to China, these "returned" students from the Soviet Union, the "Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks" as they were later called succeeded in liquidating the "Li Lisan line" and then taking over the leadership of the CCP at the 4th plenum of the VIth Central Committee in January 1931.²

Immediately after, the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks sought to impose their authority over the revolutionary bases then existing in China, particularly in the Soviets of Jiangxi, Eyuwan (Hubei-Henan-Anhui) and Xiangexi (west Hunan-Hubei). This was an understandable and logical move since the Red Army in these Soviets had by then become such a major force that its leaders could present themselves as direct rivals to the Central Committee in Shanghai.

On January 15, 1931, therefore, two days after the end of the 4th plenum, the Central Committee announced that a Central Bureau for the Soviet Areas was to be set up in the Jiangxi Soviet and was to assume control of all party organizations in the Soviet areas, including its Red Army sections. To carry out this decision, the Central Committee sent representatives faithful to the line of the new Politburo into

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- 1 Léon Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin*, New York, Pioneer Publishers, 2nd edition, 1957, p. 329.
 - 2 Sheng Yueh, *Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow and the Chinese Communist Revolution: A Personal Account*, Lawrence, Kansas, The University of Kansas Press, 1971, pp. 228-238.

each of the three main Soviet areas. Thus Zhang Guodao, Chen Changhao and Shen Zemin were sent to the Eyuwan Soviet, Xia Xi and Guan Shangying to the Xiangexi Soviet and Xiang Ying, followed by Zhou Enlai, to the Jiangxi Soviet.³

Control was established over the Eyuwan and Xiangexi Soviets by the end of 1931. The way in which this was done showed that the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks did not shrink from using harsh methods to impose their authority. In the Eyuwan Soviet, the purge reached such proportions that more than a thousand Red Army officers and political cadres, including Xu Jishen, commander of the First Army, two divisional and eight regimental commanders, and one divisional and five regimental commissars were eliminated.⁴ In the Xiangexi Soviet, Deng Zhongxia, political commissar of the 2nd Army Corps and one of the CCP's most widely-known leaders, was sacked.⁵

In contrast, the power struggle in the Jiangxi Soviet, between the Central Committee, represented by Zhou Enlai, and the "real power faction" led by Mao Zedong, was far more indecisive and reached its conclusion only with Mao's rise to power in the CCP at the start of the Long March in January 1935. For, before finally recognizing its leader, the Red Army of Jiangxi had to go through a period of crisis in which its monolithic character was severely tested.

I. The Strategic Debate : Northwest or Southeast

Mao's real power during the Jiangxi period was derived, in part, from his political influence. Descending from Jinggang Mountain at the head of the Red Army, he had been the first to carve out a revolutionary base on the border between Jiangxi and Fujian, and had thus been able to place his men in key positions at all levels in the Soviet.⁶ But Mao's authority flowed above all from his military influence. In a period such as that of Jiangxi, there could obviously be no political power worth the name

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- 3 Tso-liang Hsiao, *Power Relations within the Chinese Communist Movement 1930-1934*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1961, pp. 150-163.
 - 4 Chen Changhao, "Eyuwan suqu sufan de weida shengli" (The Great Victory of combating Counterrevolution in the Eyuwan Soviet Area), *Hongse Zhoubao* (Red Flag Weekly), No. 28 (January 18, 1932), pp. 43-57.
 - 5 "Xiangexi shengwei dui Deng Zhongxia tongzhi de jueyi" (Resolution of the Xiangexi Provincial Committee Relating to Comrade Deng Zhongxia), *ibid*, No. 29 (January 25, 1932), pp. 70-73.
 - 6 John Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition, 1927-1935*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1966, pp. 152-155.

that was not backed up by military power. It is hardly necessary to recall that Li Lisan lost control of the party because he had lost control over the Red Army. For the Central Committee dominated by the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks to be able to assert its authority over the Jiangxi Soviet, it was necessary for it first to detach the Red Army from Mao. None was better placed to carry out this task than Zhou Enlai.

With the subtlety and suppleness of mind that he retained from his social background and his international experience, Zhou Enlai already bid fair, at the start of the 1930s, to be the *eminence grise* of the Chinese Communist Party. He had been named director of the political department of the Whampoa military academy in 1925, headed the military department of the Communist Party's Central Committee since 1926, been one of the principal planners of the Nanchang uprising in 1927 and had represented the CCP at the Comintern in early 1930. Between the party's VIth congress and the fourth plenum in January 1931, he became the most influential of the Chinese communist leaders — if Li Lisan may be excepted.⁷ After the party was taken over by the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks at the 4th plenum, Zhou Enlai, with his uncommon ability to survive crises, continued to play a key role in the Politburo and retained his position of director of the military department of the Central Committee.

It was therefore this man of experience, past master in the techniques of inner-party struggle, consummate organizer and ideal political commissar, that the Shanghai-based Central Committee sent to the Jiangxi Soviet as secretary of the Central Bureau for the Soviet areas. His task was nothing less than to wrest military power from Mao and, in doing so, to assert the party's authority.

Zhou Enlai arrived in Ruijin around December 20, 1931. His first public act in the Jiangxi Soviet was on January 7, 1932, when he presented a report on the problem of the counter-revolution during a meeting of the Central Bureau for the Soviet areas, and got this body to adopt a "Resolution on the task of repressing counter-revolutionaries".⁸ Using the pretext of dealing with a problem that was certainly important but whose urgency does not emerge in any clear light, Zhou in fact used this document to launch his first attack against Mao by judiciously choosing a terrain that he knew in advance to be unfavourable to his adversary. This document opened up

7 See, in particular, Kai-yu Hsu, *Chou En-lai: China's Gray Eminence*, New York, Garden City, 1968, p. 216; Chang Kuo-tao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1927*, Lawrence, Kansas, The University of Kansas Press, 1972, vol. I, p. 531; C. Martin Wilbur, "The Ashes of Defeat", *The China Quarterly*, No. 18, April-June 1964, pp. 3-54.

8 "Guanyu suqu sufan gongzuo juejian" (Resolution on the Task of Repressing Counter-revolutionaries in the Soviet Areas), Chen Cheng Collection, reel 14.

the year-old case of the Futian Incident of December 1930, in which a part of the 20th Red Army had revolted against Mao.⁹ After stating, as the Central Bureau had done a year earlier,¹⁰ that this incident was a counter-revolutionary insurrection led by the AB (anti-Bolshevik) League, this document dwelt vigorously and at length on the serious mistakes committed by leaders of the Jiangxi Soviet in suppressing this League which, the communists claimed, had been organized by the Guomindang. According to this document, the authorities of the Jiangxi Soviet, in other words, Mao and his colleagues, had branded all landowners and rich peasants as members of the AB League and had considered all elements of non-proletarian origin to be potential members of this organization.

The document went on to say that “this misreading of the problem led to an extremely serious error in the methods of struggle against the AB League. The positive tasks of consolidating the revolutionary forces were neglected. The need to have recourse to ideological struggle and educational work was wholly overlooked The struggle against the AB League destroyed a great many revolutionary organizations. Thus, terror and suspicion set in among the masses and even within the party itself, forcing the masses and the members of the party to live in fear....”

Further on, the document raised its tone and went so far as to state that the methods of struggle against the members of the AB League had been simplified and even degraded. It denounced large-scale arbitrary arrests, notably of peasants and workers, based purely on oral testimony. It castigated “confessions forced out of people by physical torture” and “capital executions carried out light-heartedly”. To indicate that the target of all these accusations was indeed Mao, the document declared without mincing matters that the errors listed by it had been committed by the General Front Committee. And we know that this committee was under Mao’s control ever since it had been set up in the summer of 1930, and that he had used it as an instrument to extend his sway over the whole of the Jiangxi Red Army.¹¹ It is also known that the dissolution of this committee was among the very first measures decided upon by the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks immediately after they

9 For a discussion of the Futian Incident, see “The Fu-t’ien Incident, December 1930” in Ronald S. Suleski and Daniel H. Bays, *Early Communist China: Two Studies*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1969, and Zheng Xuejia, *Zhonggong Futian shibian zhenxiang* (The Truth About the Futian Incident), Taibei, Guoji gongdang wenti yanchiushe, 1976.

10 “Zhongyangju tonggao diershao – dui Futian shibian de jueyi” (Circular Note No. 2 of the Central Bureau – Resolution on the Futian Incident), January 16, 1931, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 14.

11 John Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition*, op. cit., Ch. X.

took power in the CCP.¹²

By his fierce attack on Mao's repressive policy after the Futian Incident, Zhou Enlai sought above all to exploit the differences existing within the Red Army. The incident, according to Mao himself, was the result of a power struggle between him and those Red Army elements that favoured the Li Lisan line.¹³ And Zhou was not unaware of the fact that Peng Dehuai's third Army Corps had been the spearhead of this line and that a part of this force had already asked to be detached from the Red Army commanded by Mao.¹⁴ By opening up the old wound of the Futian Incident, Zhou was only following the classic tactic of "divide and rule".

There are signs that Peng Dehuai was not unmoved by this conjuring up of the Futian Incident. The reappearance of signs of differences between Peng and Mao coincided, as if by chance, with Zhou Enlai's arrival in the Jiangxi Soviet.

In a article published in December 1931, Peng Dehuai strongly criticised Mao's ideas on the building of the Red Army:

"We oppose those who seek only to preserve their armies in order to defend their little kingdoms, those capable of organizing only red guards, partisan units and guard battalions to defend some village, canton or district, those who are not resolved to increase the numbers of the Red Army and to fight for a preliminary victory in one or more provinces. The horizon of these people is as limited as that of a frog gazing up at the sky from the bottom of a well. Their ideology is a one hundred per cent peasant ideology. We are also opposed to the erroneous notion according to which the numbers of the Red Army can be increased only by creating independant divisions...

"Certain comrades have declared that it would be impossible to recruit more soldiers in the Soviet area because production should not be neglected. Once this poisonous vapour was spread about, several excuses were made for not increasing the numbers of the Red Army in many parts of the Soviet area. It is wrong to concentrate on production at the expense of the Red Army's expansion. In future, when the development of the revolutionary war has reached its culminating point, it will be necessary to adopt the system of compulsory military service."¹⁵

12 "Zhonggong suqu zhongyangju tonggao diyi hao -suweiai quyu zhongyangju de chengli ji qi renwu" (Circular No. 1 of the CCP Central Bureau of the Soviet Areas - Establishment of the Central Bureau of the Soviet Areas and Its Tasks), 15 January 1931, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 14.

13 Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, First revised and enlarged edition, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 205-206.

14 *Ibid.* p. 205.

15 Peng Dehuai, "Kuoda hongjun" (Red Army's Expansion), in *Wuku* (Arsenal), No. 7 (December 31, 1931), pp. 9-10, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 7.

Although Mao's name was not mentioned in this passage, there is no doubt that it was he who was being called a frog gazing at the sky from the bottom of a well. For everyone knew, during the Jiangxi period, that it was Mao who advocated the creation first of red guards and then of local forces, with the establishment of regular Red Army forces as the culminating point. Peng's attack against those who thought only to preserve their armies in order to protect their little kingdoms, was quite clearly directed against Mao, and it is probable that, in writing this article, Peng also sought to express his discontent, not to speak of his resentment against Mao's attitude during the Red Army's two attacks on Changsha during the summer of 1930.

A span of seven days saw the successive publication of Peng's article sharply attacking Mao's ideas on the building of the Red Army and the Central Bureau's resolution, inspired by Zhou Enlai, violently attacking Mao's methods in the struggle against the AB League. The coincidence is too striking for questions not to be asked about other possible connections between these two events.

The Central Bureau's resolution of January 7, 1932 was only Zhou's first arrow against his adversary. It would be naive to imagine that it could have sufficed to divest Mao of all his military power in the Red Army. There are signs that the struggle between the two men for the control of the Red Army was a harsh one and that it was only at the Conference of Ningdu in August 1932 that Zhou gained the upper hand.

Military power in the Jiangxi Soviet could be located at two levels: strategic decision-making and the effective conduct of battle. At the level of effective operational leadership, there are signs that after he arrived in the Jiangxi Soviet, Zhou Enlai experienced numerous difficulties in taking over an army that he had not himself created. During the siege of Ganzhou (early February -March 8, 1932) Zhou stayed in Ruijin with Xiang Ying where he took part in the Conference of workers' delegates from Fujian and Jiangxi¹⁶, and found the time to write an editorial for the *Hongse Zhonghua*¹⁷. During the 1932 spring offensive in Fujian province, Mao was with the Ist Army Corps in the very thick of battle¹⁸ while Zhou stayed in the rear, at a respectable distance from the front¹⁹. Yet, given the conditions in which the Jiangxi encirclement campaigns developed, it was indispensable for a communist

16 "Mingan liangsheng gongren daibiao dahui kaimo shengkuang" (Inauguration of the Conference of Workers' Delegates from Fujian and Jiangxi), *Hongse Zhonghua* (Red China), No. 9 (February 10, 1932), pp. 7-8.

17 *Ibid.*, No. 12 (March 2, 1932), p. 1.

18 Liu Zhong, "Donglujun zhan Zhangzhou cheng" (Occupation of Zhangzhou by the East Route Army), *Xinghuo Liaoyuan* (A Single Spark can Start A Prairie Fire), Vol. II, pp. 120-130.

19 *Hongse Zhonghua*, No. 20 (May 25, 1932), p 5

leader to be present at the front if he was to wield effective military power. For, given the inadequacy of communications, urgent decisions usually had to be taken in the field.

As for strategic decisions, the so-called offensive line had been clearly laid down by the Central Committee in early 1932, in its famous January 9 "Resolution on obtaining a preliminary victory for the revolution in one or more provinces".²⁰ This resolution meant, in fact, the revival to a lesser degree of Li Lisan's policy of attacking urban centres, with the difference that it was now the Red Army that became directly responsible for this task. To the south of the Yangzi, the ambition of the Chinese communists was to occupy key towns in the Gan river valley (Nanchang, Fuzhou, Jian etc.) so as to link up the Soviet bases and obtain a preliminary victory in Hunan, Henan and Jiangxi provinces. North of the Yangzi, the CCP hoped to set up a huge revolutionary base whose centre would be the Eyuwan Soviet and which could directly threaten Wuhan, the Yangzi valley and the Peking-Hankou railway. The attack by the 3rd Army Corps against Ganzhou was the first step in this strategy. To justify this policy, Zhou did not hesitate to advance an ultra-leftist view: In an article written on February 9, 1932, the very day on which the Red Army reached the walls of Ganzhou, he said: "Japanese and American troops have already entered into armed conflict in Shanghai... The great explosion of world war in the Pacific is imminent...China will become the battlefield of this great murderous imperialist war...Once this extremely murderous imperialist world war has broken out in China, the oppressed Chinese masses will rise up and struggle with the strength born of despair. This struggle will inevitably kindle the flame of revolutionary struggle throughout China. And this revolutionary flame will then set fire to some of the world's largest countries..."²¹

This wild optimism on the part of Zhou was reflected in his judgment of military prospects in Jiangxi province. He considered the capture of Ganzhou to be something already achieved.²² Besides, this conviction was shared by the other partisans of the "Bolshevik offensive line". In a directive letter addressed to the 3rd Army

20 "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zhengqu geming zai yisheng yu shusheng shouxian shengli de jueyi" (Resolution on Obtaining a Preliminary Victory for the Revolution in One or More Provinces), *Shihua* (True Words), No. 3 (April 20, 1932), pp. 7-11.

21 Zhou Enlai, "Diguozhuyi dazhan de weiji yu dang de muqian jinjin renwu" (The Crisis of a Great Imperialist War and the Urgent Tasks of the Party at the Present), *Ibid.* No. 1 (February 14, 1932), pp. 1-4.

22 Zhou Enlai, "Hongjun shierjun zhanling hangwu de yiyi" (The Signification of the Occupation of Shanghang and Wuping by the 12th Army of the Red Army), *Hongse Zhonghua*, No. 12 (March 2, 1932), p. 1.

Corps, the General Political Department, led by Wang Jiaxiang, asserted already that the Red Army did not intend to occupy Ganzhou temporarily but to keep it as a springboard for communist expansion towards the north.²³ An internal document of the 3rd Army Corps also reveals that Peng Dehuai planned to leave at least one division to defend the town after occupying it, and that various announcements (to the population, workers etc.) had already been drafted by the leaders of this corps.²⁴

Not unexpectedly, the failure of the siege of Ganzhou could only intensify the conflict between Zhou Enlai and Mao. After this failure, if the general political department is to be believed, the struggle against right opportunism and defeatism became the main combat goal of the Red Army. For voices were now raised in the party, asserting that the communist forces should turn towards regions where the enemy forces were less powerful, and maintaining that the policy of heading north in order to occupy key towns in the Gan river valley was mistaken.²⁵ These voices most probably included Mao's.

In early 1932, the strategic debate within the CCP could be summarized in a simple phrase: whether to go northwest or southeast. Despite the failure of the siege of Ganzhou, the partisans of the bolshevist offensive line, led by Zhou Enlai, persisted in their belief that the decision to occupy the key towns of the Gan river valley was politically correct. Mao, on the contrary, advocated expansion towards Fujian province. This maoist strategic line was not a new one. At the time of the Futian Incident in December 1930, the "Fujian line" put forward by Mao had already drawn sharp criticism from Li Lisan's partisans who then controlled the southwest Jiangxi action committee.²⁶

The expedition into Fujian province, undertaken by the 1st Army Corps, buttressed by the 15th Army of the 5th Army Corps, could not therefore have resulted from a decision by Zhou Enlai. It did not conform to the strategy defined by the Central Committee in its Resolution on obtaining a preliminary victory for the rev-

23 "Guanyu Ganzhou gongzuo de yifeng zhishixin" (Directive Letter on the Work in Ganzhou), February 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 7.

24 "Disanjuntuan zhengzhibu de shici gongzuo huiyi jueyi" (Resolution of the 10th Meeting of the Political Department of the 3rd Army Corps), January 31, 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 7.

25 "Hongjun zong zhengzhibu xunling - Ganzhouzhazheng de jiaoxun qi hongjun de zhongxin renwu" (Instruction of the General Political Department of the Red Army - The Lessons of the Battle of Ganzhou and the Principal Tasks of the Red Army), March 30, 1932, *Ibid.* reel 9.

26 "Zhongyangju gei silu tongzhi de xin" (Letter of the Central Bureau to the Comrades of the West Route), *Ibid.* reel 19.

olution in one or more provinces. The fact that this offensive into Fujian took place and that it was personally led by Mao is significant, and indicates that, in the spring of 1932, Zhou had not succeeded in supplanting him in the conduct of operations or in strategic decision-making.

The purpose of the 1st Army Corp's expedition into Fujian province was three-fold. In military terms, Mao, unlike Zhou Enlai, had little faith in the possibility of communist expansion towards the northwest. He is said to have told his troops that the Gan river was a difficult hurdle for the Red Army which, on the contrary could, by turning eastwards, draw support from the already solidly-based Soviet area in west Fujian and find vast regions in which to manoeuvre in the south of this province. It is also probable that, in leading the 1st Army Corps towards the east, Mao was following one of his *idées forces*, that of attacking the weakest link in the chain of the enemy. The troops of Fujian province were composed essentially, in Zhu De's own words, of "professional bandits incorporated into the Guomintang armies".²⁷ The relative ease with which Mao's forces put Zhang Zhen's division to rout in occupying Zhangzhou on April 22 would seem to confirm the great vulnerability of the local troops.

No less vital was the economic objective of the spring offensive of 1932. Two days after occupying Zhangzhou, the Red Army organized a vast "verification" campaign in order to collect all that the victors considered to be war booty. Two thousand porters were drafted in to carry the captured equipment to the Jiangxi Soviet. More than one million *yuan* were collected during the occupation of the city.

These war spoils not only "resolved the problem of procuring supplies for the Red Army but also provided active support for the construction of the Soviet area and for the fourth and fifth counter-encirclement campaigns."²⁸ In leading the 1st Army Corps into Fujian province, Mao also sought no doubt to obtain salt. In normal times, the population of Jiangxi receives this vital commodity from the province of Jiangsu via Jiujiang. Since this route had been cut off by the Guomintang blockade, only the Fujian coastal region could supply salt to those who lived in the Jiangxi Soviet.

The politico-strategical purpose of the expedition into Fujian province is probably the one most subject to controversy. Before leaving Jiangxi, Mao is said to have told his troops: "The Japanese forces have reached Xiamen (Amoy). Their warships

27 Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh*, London, John Calder, 1958, p. 241.

28 *Dangde Jianshe* (Party Construction), No. 1 (June 5, 1932), p. 19; Deng Zihui, "Hongjun ruzhang qianhou" (Before and After the Occupation of Zhangzhou by the Red Army), *Hongqi Piaopiao* (The Red Flag Waves), Vol. XI, p. 82; Liu Zhong, "Donglujun zhan Zhangzhou cheng", article cit.

patrol the coast in order to make a landing and launch an offensive into the interior. Our expedition into south Fujian is therefore a direct response to this Japanese plot of aggression. In displaying our party's anti-Japanese policy through real action, we can appreciably increase our political influence inside and outside China.²⁹ It would seem that the communists' final objective was indeed Amoy. Lin Biao, who commanded the expeditionary army, confirmed this to Nym Wales.³⁰ Gong Chu also reports plans for attacking Amoy after the occupation of Zhangzhou.³¹ A contemporary document, published in the organ of the 3rd Army Corps's political department and expressing the opinions of Peng Dehuai and his close companions in arms, flays the "right opportunists" who, not daring to attack the key towns of the Gan river valley, advocated the occupation of "a certain port".³² This is the only instance of a text of this period referring to communists advocating the occupation of "a certain port", and this port could be none other than Amoy. A close analysis of the situation in China in the spring of 1932 suggests that an attack on Amoy by the Red Army could well have formed part of a vast and undeclared political and strategic move designed to nip the fourth encirclement campaign in the bud. A communist attack on Amoy would, in all probability, have provoked Japanese intervention in this city. It was probably in order to heighten this possibility that Mao, acting in the name of the Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic, got a declaration of war against Japan published five days before the occupation of Zhangzhou.³³ Japanese military intervention in South China would have probably prevented the signing of the armistice in Shanghai between the Guomindang and the Japanese troops. And this armistice agreement, finally concluded on May 5, 1932, was the unavoidable condition for any new encirclement campaign against the Jiangxi Soviet.

Why the 1st Army Corps stayed in Zhangzhou for nearly a month and a half without Mao's deciding to push his grand move to a conclusion remains unclear. It could be that the Sino-Japanese armistice was signed more swiftly than expected. It is also possible that Zhou Enlai, realising that a Red Army attack on Amoy would result in

29 "Donglujun zhan Zhangzhou cheng", article cit.

30 Nym Wales, *Red Dust*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1952, p. 164.

31 Gong Chu, *Wo yu Hongjun* (I and the Red Army), Hong Kong, Nanfeng chubanshe, 1954, pp. 320-321.

32 Yang Youlin, "Jianjue zhixing jiji jingong de luxian lai jinian pingbao" (Execute the Active and Offensive Line Resolutely to Commemorate the Military Uprising of Pingjiang), *Zhengzhi Shenghuo* (Political Life), No. 1 (July 22, 1932), pp. 17-20.

33 "Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo linshi zhongyang zhengfu xunbu dui ri zhanzheng xunyan" (Declaration of War against Japan by the Provisional Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic), April 15, 1932, *Hongse Zhonghua*, No. 18 (April 21, 1932), p. 2.

the total reversal of the strategic line defined by the Central Committee, sought by all means to bring Mao and his army back to Jiangxi. It may also be noted that, faced with the unexpected success of the Fujian expedition, the communist leadership in Shanghai began to show signs of disquiet. In a telegram sent to the Central Bureau of the Soviet areas on May 21, 1932, the Central Committee sternly called Zhou Enlai to order. The telegram rebuked the officials of the Central Bureau for their lack of firmness in judging the political situation and in the struggle to obtain a preliminary victory in one or more provinces, and then affirmed the need to implement an active offensive line, that is, to occupy one or two key towns in the Gan river valley. This directive reached the Jiangxi Soviet on May 27.³⁴ Three days later, Zhou Enlai published an important article in which he firmly asserted that communist forces throughout the country must imperatively follow the active offensive line advocated by the party and explicitly disowned the occupation of Zhangzhou.³⁵ In this text, Zhou compared the Soviet areas of Eyuwan (Hubei, Henan and Anhui) and Xiangxi (western Hunan-Hubei) with the central Soviet area (Jiangxi-Fujian).

The communists forces in the first two Soviets, said Zhou, had won great victories because the Central Committee had been able to expose anti-party plots in eliminating certain leaders of the Red Army whereas, in the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet, the Red Army was still being influenced by the right opportunist line. This mistaken line, Zhou then asserted, was the reason why the attack on Ganzhou had failed since it had exerted a pernicious influence, in both tactical and strategic terms, upon the Red Army. Owing to this mistaken line, the Red Army had not yet understood that the strategy of drawing the enemy deeply into Soviet territory, which had been considered to be the most suitable during the first three encirclement campaigns, was no longer applicable in 1932. As a result of these mistakes, said Zhou, the Jiangxi Red Army had not been able to gain the successes that it should have had since the third encirclement campaign. He added: "After the failure of the siege of Ganzhou, the Red Army was forced, by its material situation, to launch an attack on Zhangzhou, thus removing the possibility of a swift occupation of the Gan river valley towns and of a preliminary victory in Jiangxi and its neighbouring provinces".

34 "Zhongyang zhishidian yu zhongyangju guanyu zhengqu he wancheng Jiangxi ji qi linjin shengqu geming shouxian shengli de jueyi" (Directive Telegram of the Central and Resolution of the Central Bureau regarding Winning and Achieving Preliminary Victory in Jiangxi and Its Neighboring Provinces), May 21 and June 16, 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 16.

35 Zhou Enlai, "Yonghu quanguo hongjun de shengli, jianjue zhixing jiji jingong de luxian" (Uphold the Victory of the Red Army in the Nation, Execute the Active and Offensive Line Resolutely), *Shihua*, No. 5 (May 30, 1932), pp. 1-4.

It is hardly necessary to read between the lines to understand that this article was a warning addressed to Mao. In holding up the Eyuwan and Xiangexi purges as examples, in declaring that the maoist strategy was no longer acceptable and in explicitly disowning the Fujian expedition, Zhou Enlai was already announcing the decisive confrontation between the two Red Army tendencies at the Conference of Ningdu.

II. The Ningdu Conference and the Fourth Encirclement Campaign

Acting probably under combined pressure from the Central Committee in Shanghai and the Central Bureau in Ruijin, and no doubt also because he anticipated a major Guomindang offensive from the north, Mao abandoned the plan to attack Amoy. The expeditionary army evacuated Zhangzhou on May 28³⁶ but remained all the same in Fujian since, at the end of June, it was still in the town of Longyan, about a hundred kilometers north of Zhangzhou. From there, it headed for the area between Dayu and Nanxiong, on the Jiangxi-Guangdong border. There it joined up with the 3rd Army Corps led by Peng Dehuai³⁷, who had been active in this area since the failure of the siege of Ganzhou. In early and mid-July, and especially during a fierce battle that lasted three days and three nights from 8 to 10 July, the Red Army routed eighteen regiments of the Guangdong army.³⁸ The communist forces, therefore, did not withdraw to the Jiangxi Soviet until the end of July.

Given the lack of precise information, there are no grounds for asserting that Mao stayed with the 1st Army Corps after the withdrawal from Zhangzhou. But the fact that he made it a point to lead the Fujian expedition in person clearly shows that he wished to exert a continued influence on an army that was of his creation and which ensured his real power in the Chinese Soviet Republic. Since there is no evidence either to show that he was present in the Jiangxi Soviet in July 1932, it may be assumed that Jerome Chen's assertion, according to which Mao, coming from a campaign in Fujian province, went "straight" to the Ningdu Conference³⁹, corresponds to the facts.

36 Wang Jianmin, *Zhongguo Gongchandang shigao* (Draft History of the CCP), Taipei, 1965, Vol. II, p. 689.

37 "Junshi weiyuanhui bayue bari zai Xingguo de xunling" (Instruction Issued by the Military Council on August 8 in Xingguo), *Chifei wenxian huibian* (A Collection of Red Bandit Documents), Vol. X, p. 242, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 21.

38 "Hongjun dierci weida shengli" (The Second Great Victory of the Red Army), *Hongse Zhonghua*, No. 27, (July 14, 1932) p. 1.

39 Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, London, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 176.

It is important that the movements of the 1st Army Corps (and hence those of Mao) be examined with care, not simply because of any preoccupation with detail but also in order to understand the significance of the Ningdu Conference. Mao could not be unaware of the fact that his military power was under threat after Zhou's arrival in the Jiangxi Soviet, and his likely purpose in going with the 1st Army Corps into Fujian, and probably into north Guangdong, was to preserve his control over this elite unit. In fact, by this action, he left a vast field of manoeuvre open to those who were seeking to weaken his position. When he returned to Jiangxi in July, there was little time left for him to prepare for the confrontation with his detractors at the Ningdu Conference. For their part, the leaders of the Central Committee and the Central Bureau were able to take advantage of Mao's long absence to strengthen the position of the party in the Red Army.

Immediately after Mao left for Fujian, the CCP leaders took various steps to reinforce the party's influence over the communist forces. An article published in the organ of the General Political Department in April 1932 set the tone for this campaign. Declaring that, since the party's first Congress held in the central Soviet area in November 1931, there had been some progress made in organizing the system of political commissars, suppressing groups created in an irregular manner outside the party framework and eliminating personal influences, this article pointed out that, in some units, the political commissar system was still a fiction and that party control was being "imperceptibly suppressed".⁴⁰ In May, the first Congress of the Soviet of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of Jiangxi adopted a resolution stressing the point that during the initial period when the Jiangxi Soviet was being established, doubtful elements had infiltrated various Soviet organs and that this phenomenon was especially evident in the Red Army which had incorporated bandits and non-proletarian elements into its ranks.⁴¹ In June, the Central Bureau published a working programme for the development and reform of the party. This document considered the party's most serious mistake in the central Soviet area to be that of having neglected to take over the direction of the Red Army. It denounced the anti-party nature of the slogan, "We oppose party monopoly of all work!" put forward by the Red Army's former general political department, led by Mao, and declared that the tasks of leading the revolutionary war and strengthening the communist armies

40 Zeng Risan, "Dang zai hongjun zhong de zuijin zuzhi renwu" (The Urgent Tasks of Party Organisation in the Red Army) *Zhengzhi Gongzuo* (Political Work), No. 3 (April 1932) pp. 9-15.

41 "Jiangxi gongnongbing suweiai diyici quansheng dahui dui suweiai gongzuo baogao de jueyi" (Resolution on the Work Report of the First Soviet Congress of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of Jiangxi Province), May 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 10.

were not at all the prerogative of the Red Army but an integral part of the party's work.⁴² Four days after drawing up this programme, the Central Bureau published a resolution that stressed the need to create a unified leadership for the Red Army in order to concentrate its forces and undertake a decisive war against the enemy in the white area and swiftly occupy the key towns of the Gan river valley.⁴³ This inordinately optimistic, and even plainly demagogic, objective was confirmed by the Central Committee in Shanghai, which adopted a resolution on June 21 defining the communist strategy for the fourth encirclement campaign. This document analyzed the balance of forces between the Guomindang and CCP and then concluded, as was met, that the Red Army was assured of victory, launching for the first time the slogan: "We shall not yield an inch of Soviet territory to the Guomindang forces!"⁴⁴

On July 21, one month after adopting this resolution, the Central Committee sent a letter to the Central Bureau and to party committees in Fujian and Jiangxi, listing the mistakes committed in the central Soviet area and laying special emphasis on two mistakes for which Mao was uncontestedly responsible even if the letter did not mention him by name. The authorities of the Jiangxi Soviet, said the Central Committee, had failed in their task of building up a great Red Army. It was thus that the troop strength of the Red Army was considerably diminished at the end of 1931, after the first three encirclement campaigns. Secondly, the Central Committee criticised Mao's activities in Fujian, asserting that during the one-month occupation of Zhangzhou, "the leading comrades of the Red Army" had devoted their energies to collecting funds instead of fully exploiting this excellent situation to mobilize the masses.⁴⁵

The Ningdu Conference was held, in all likelihood, during the very first days of August since, on August 8, the Revolutionary Military Council published a direc-

42 "Fazhan dang he gaizao dang de gongzuo dagang" (A Working Programm for Party Development and Party Reform), June 12, 1932, *Dangde Jianshe*, No. 2, (June 15, 1932), pp. 1-30.

43 "Zhongyangju guanyu zhengqu he wancheng Jiangxi ji qi linjin shengqu geming shouxian shengli de jueyi" (Resolution of the Central Bureau regarding Winning and Achieving Preliminary Victory in Jiangxi and Its Neighboring Provinces), June 16, 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 16.

44 "Zhongyang guanyu diguozhuyi Guomindang sici weijiao yu women de renwu de jueyi" (Resolution of the Central on the Imperialist-Guomindang 4th Encirclement Campaign and Our Tasks), *Geming yu Zhazheng* (Revolution and War), No. 1, (August 1st, 1932), pp. 1-10.

45 "Zhongyang zhi suqu zhongyangju ji min gan liang shengwei xin" (Letter from the Central to the Central Bureau, Soviet Areas, and to Both the Fujian and Jiangxi Provincial Committees), July 21, 1932, *Shihua*, No. 8 (September 20, 1932), pp. 1-9.

tive to the Red Army at Xingguo, announcing the tasks to be accomplished for the fourth campaign, which had undoubtedly been decided upon at this meeting.⁴⁶ Given the importance that the Chinese communists attach to anniversaries, we may even venture to put the date on which the conference was convoked at August 1, 1932, the fifth anniversary of the Nanchang uprising.

The Ningdu Conference took place in a town that was in state of total ferment, with an extremely tense atmosphere. The cause of this was an incident on July 22, when the town's red guards had revolted following acts of brutality committed against some of them by Liu Jun, vice-chairman of the municipal Soviet, during military practice. The local population made common cause with the red guards, organized a mass demonstration and decided on a three-day strike. Demonstrators occupied the headquarters of the local government by force, seeking to lynch Liu Jun.⁴⁷

The situation, apparently spontaneous in origin, that was created by this incident, was immediately exploited by the leaders of the Central Bureau in order to show up, on the one hand, the incapacity of the Soviet government under Mao's authority and, on the other, the efficiency of the party in mobilizing the masses. On July 22 and 23, more than 40 propaganda teams, organized by the party, went all over the town urging the population to stop holding mass meetings and to give up the strike. On July 29, the local militia, led by the party, succeeded in recapturing Fort Guanyin, which had been occupied by anti-communist elements.⁴⁸ On August 1, the party mobilized more than 10,000 people in a mass demonstration in Ningdu. A public trial was held in the town on August 3 and, on August 4, "the ringleaders of the counter-revolution" were executed while, at the same time, a huge gathering of more than 50,000 militiamen from the whole district met to pledge support for the party's offensive line. In order to stress the point that these actions had been taken by the party alone, a document published in August 1932 stated that the only way to settle the red guards incident had been to mobilize the party. "During this affair," said the document, "the Soviet government revealed its incapacity to cope with events by itself...Certain comrades in the government got into a panic... they lost confidence and felt terribly afraid of the counter-revolutionary forces".⁴⁹

46 "Junshi weiyuanhui bayue bari zai Xingguo de xunling", document cit.

47 "Zhonggong Ningdu xianwei guanyu chengshi chiweijun shibian de jueyi" (Resolution of the CCP Committee of the Ningdu District concerning the Red Guard Incident in Ningdu), July 22, 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 9.

48 Cf. *Hongse Zhonghua*, Nos. 30, 34, 40, 47.

49 "Ningdu chengshi qiweijun shibian yuanyin chuzhi ji qi jiaoxun" (The Causes, Settlement and Lessons of the Red Guard Incident in Ningdu on July 22), August 1932, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 9.

It was therefore in an atmosphere of extreme tension, no doubt deliberately fanned by the leaders of the Central Bureau, that Mao had to undergo the trial of the Ningdu Conference. In October 1966, during the Cultural Revolution, he said: "During the Ningdu Conference, Luo Fu wanted to expel me [from the party] but Zhou [Enlai] and Zhu [De] did not agree."⁵⁰ This statement has given rise to a variety of interpretations. Guo Hualun points out, no doubt with justification, that Luo Fu could not have taken part in this conference, and says that, in speaking of Luo Fu's wish to expel him from the party, Mao was committing either a lapse of memory or a deliberate act of calumny.⁵¹ However, Mao's statement does not necessarily imply that Luo Fu was present at the Ningdu Conference. Luo Fu could very well have been in Shanghai while seeking to eliminate Mao during this conference. It could also be that when Mao said "Luo Fu wanted to expel me from the party," he was thinking of the 28 Bolsheviks as a whole.

As for Mao's saying, that Zhou Enlai and Zhu De did not agree with Luo Fu about his expulsion, this does not at all mean, as William Dorrill seems to suggest⁵², that Zhou and Zhu supported the maoist strategy at the Conference of Ningdu. Far more conceivably, this statement indicates that, being better aware than Luo Fu of realities in the Jiangxi Soviet, they feared the political and military consequences of permanently eliminating Mao since he still exerted much influence over certain powerful cadres in the Chinese Soviet Republic's administrative machine and over a part of the Red Army including, in particular, Lin Biao's 1st Army Corps.⁵³

Nonetheless, without going so far as to expel Mao from the party, the partisans of the Central Committee's offensive line, led by Zhou Enlai, were able to divest him of all military power. For, immediately after the conference, Mao went into the Tingzhou hospital in west Fujian for a four-month stay, sharing quarters with Zhou Yili, the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, and Chen Zhengren, Vice-Chairman of the Jiangxi Soviet Government. There is no doubt of the "diplomatic" nature of Mao's illness. His doctor, Fu Lianzhang, wrote: "In theory, Chairman Mao

50 "Zai huibao huiyi shang de jianghua" (Talk at a Work Conference), October 24, 1966, *Mao Zedong Sixiang Wansui* (Long Live Mao Zedong Thought), n.p., April 1967, p. 45.

51 Guo Hualun, *Zhonggong Shilun* (Analytical History of the CCP), Taipei, Institute of International Relations, 1969-1971, Vol. IV, p. 467.

52 William F. Dorrill, "Rewriting History to further Maoism: The Ningtu Conference of 1932", in James Chieh Hsiung (ed), *The Logic of "Maoism"*, New York, Praeger, 1974, p. 69.

53 Cf. Chi-hsi Hu, "Mao, Lin Biao and the Fifth Encirclement Campaign", *The China Quarterly*, No. 82, June 1980, pp. 250-280.

has come for a rest. In fact, he works daily without interruption".⁵⁴ For four months, he took long daily walks and studied marxist-leninist works, among them *Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*⁵⁵. An apparently innocuous incident during Mao's stay in Tingzhou clearly shows that he wielded no decision-making power at that time. One day, Fu Lianzhang asked Mao for permission to transfer the Tingzhou hospital to Ruijin, thinking that the Chairman of the Central Soviet Government could give his assent on the spot. To his great surprise, however, Mao advised him to consult Xiang Ying, and Fu Lianzhang was obliged to travel from Tingzhou to Ruijin in order to get his plan authorized by the Vice-Chairman of the Soviet Government.⁵⁶

At the beginning of 1933, when the fourth campaign was in full swing on the northern front, Mao, having spent four months in Tingzhou returned to Ruijin where he could find nothing better to do than to take charge of the installation of the Soviet hospital in Ruijin making visits to the wounded and sick of the Red Army.⁵⁷

In his article on the Ningdu Conference, William Dorrill, mistakenly wishing to show at all costs that Mao had not lost military power in August 1932, puts forward a series of arguments to support the thesis that he rewrote history in order to create the myth of his infallibility and erase his own responsibility for the loss of the Jiangxi Soviet. In particular, Dorrill maintains that Mao preserved his position as general political commissar until May 8, 1933, that subsequently he willingly yielded military power to Zhou in order to devote more time to mass mobilization, that there was no upheaval in the high command of the Red Army after the Ningdu Conference and that the behaviour of the communist forces after this conference was relatively prudent despite all the rhetoric surrounding the offensive line.⁵⁸

Yet, in addition to the fact that Mao withdrew into the Tingzhou hospital immediately after the Ningdu Conference, there are documents clearly showing that he had stopped being the general political commissar of the Red Army well before May 8, 1933, the date on which Zhou Enlai was officially named to this position.⁵⁹ Several

54 Fu Lianzhang, "Zhongyang hongse yiyuan de jianli" (The Establishment of the Red Central Hospital), *Hongqi Piaopiao*, Vol. XI, pp. 3-18.

55 Fang Qiang, "Maozhuxi dao nanxian de yijian shishi" (The Historical Truth about Chairman Mao's Visit to the Southern Front), *Ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 84.

56 Fu Lianzhang, art. cit., p. 12.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

58 William Dorrill, art. cit., pp. 69-72.

59 "Zhongyang renmin weiyuanhui di sishiyici changhui" (The 41st Ordinary Meeting of the Council of People's Commissars of the Central Government), *Hongse Zhonghua*, no. 78 (May 11, 1933) p. 1.

telegrams sent by the Central Soviet Government to the Red Army at the height of the fourth encirclement campaign in January and March 1933 were already being addressed to Zhou Enlai as the general political commissar.⁶⁰

The apparent stability of the communist high command, noted by Dorrill, does not necessarily constitute proof of *status quo* in the balance of forces within the Red Army. First of all, the military commanders could have changed their opinions whilst remaining in their positions. And then, certain military leaders, who until then had not wielded any real responsibility in the conduct of the war, could have assumed such responsibility without any consequent upheaval in the high command.

The signs are that there was a drastic change in the communist strategic line after the Ningdu Conference. The most significant facts here are obviously Mao's absence and Zhou Enlai's take-over of the Red Army as general political commissar. Under the political commissar system prevailing during the Jiangxi period, the power of the commissars was theoretically unlimited. A political commissar was empowered not only to hand down unilateral political orders but also to prohibit military commanders from issuing commands. When there were differences between the commander and the political commissar, it was the latter who was empowered to take the final decision.⁶¹ Of course there were often gaps of varying degrees between theory and practice, and one might wonder what real power could have been wielded by people like Teng Daiyuan or Nie Rongzhen when faced with commanders of the stature of Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao. The balance of forces in the Red Army during the Jiangxi period was determined by complex factors. Thus, the leaders of the 1st Army Corps made no public declarations in favour of the Central Committee's offensive line either before or after the Ningdu Conference. A number of unmistakable signs even suggest that the 1st Army Corps continued to favour the maoist strategy.⁶² But this does not belie the fact that, after the Ningdu Conference, the overall leadership of the Red Army effectively passed into the hands of Zhou Enlai.

60 See in particular "Zhongyang zhenfu jiajiang qianfang quanti hongse zhanshi dian" (Telegram of Felicitation from the Central Government to All Red Combatants on the Front), *Ibid.*, No. 47 (January 14, 1933), p. 2; "Zhongyang zhengfu zhiqianfang hongjun dian" (Telegram from the Central Government to the Red Army on the Front), *Ibid.*, No. 58, (March 6, 1933), p. 2.

61 "Jianli zhengzhiweiyuan zhidu, zhandouyuan zhengzhi he jiaoyu tigang" (Establishment of the System of Political Commissars – Plan for the Political Education of the Combatants), n. d., Chen Cheng Collection, reel 3. See also Peter Williams Donovan, *The Red Army in Kiangsi, 1931-1934*, Ithaca, Cornell University, East Asia Papers Series, 1976, pp. 73-88.

62 Cf. Chi-hsi Hu, art. cit.

The new leadership of the Red Army first showed itself in an instruction note published on August 8, 1932 in Xingguo, by the Military Council acting under Zhu De's authority. This document in fact proclaimed the rallying of the Red Army, as a whole, to the strategic line advocated by the Central Committee. At a time when the Guomindang offensive against the Eyuwan and Xiangxi Soviets had already met with major successes, this document specified the tasks of the Red Army in the following terms: "The 1st Front Army should manoeuvre with the maximum mobility and swiftness in order to prevent a concerted attack by the enemy. It should steal a march on the enemy by destroying his forces one after another and annihilating his vital forces on the front. After gaining victory on the front, it should pursue its task relentlessly and without hesitation to gain victory on another front. It is only thus that we shall be able to achieve coordinated action among Red Army forces throughout the country, break the fourth encirclement campaign by a victorious offensive, occupy key towns such as Nanchang, Jian, Zhangshu, Fuzhou and Ganzhou, and facilitate the task of the Chinese Soviet movement which is to win a preliminary victory in one or more provinces".⁶³

In accordance with this strategy, the Military Council ordered the main forces of the Red Army (the 1st, 3rd and 5th Army Corps), which were then concentrated in Ningdu and Xingguo, to move towards Lean and Yihuang in order to attack the nationalist troops under Gao Shuxun.⁶⁴ In an article in early October 1932, the first written by him since the Ningdu conference, Zhou Enlai restated this emphasis on a huge offensive outside Soviet territory to the north. This article denounced the dangers of right opportunism, which consisted in waiting for the enemy's forces to penetrate the Jiangxi Soviet before annihilating them and put forward, for the first time, the slogan: "Attack along the whole front".⁶⁵ We know that in December 1936, in his article on "Strategy in China's Revolutionary War", Mao severely criticised this slogan of Zhou Enlai's. It was, wrote Mao, strategically erroneous, not only for the purpose of defence but also when taking the offensive. "Attacking along the whole front", he wrote, can only be found very rarely in reality. This slogan is an expression of the egalitarianism in the use of forces that goes with the habit of military adventurism".⁶⁶

63 "Junshi weiyuanhui bayue bari zai xingguo de xunling", document cit., pp. 243-244.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

65 Zhou Enlai, "Kaizhan shengli de jingong, fensui diren daju jingong" (Developing a Victorious Offensive; Smashing the Great Offensive of the Enemy), *Shihua*, No. 9, (October 25, 1932), pp. 2-3.

66 Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Xuanji* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong), Beijing, Renmin Chubanshe, 1966, p. 219.

At the very moment when Zhou Enlai was putting out the slogan "Attack along the whole front", a discreet piece of information published in the *Hongse Zhonghua* provided additional proof of the change in communist military policy. Liu Bocheng, who had come out with the most incisive criticism of maoist strategy, was called to the front in early October 1932.⁶⁷ It was most probably after this date that he took up the major duties of chief of the staff of the Revolutionary Military Council. Since arriving in the Jiangxi Soviet in the spring of 1931, Liu, a professional soldier trained in China and in the Soviet Union, had never enjoyed any real responsibility for the conduct of the war in Jiangxi province. Before he was called to the front, Liu was commander of the Ruijin garrison, a position of no great significance since the capital of the Chinese Soviet Republic had never been threatened since the end of the third encirclement campaign. In the Jiangxi Soviet, Liu Bocheng led those who advocated the transformation of the Chinese Red Army on the model of that of the Soviet Union. He translated a number of text-books used in military schools in the Soviet Union, and had them published in the journals of Jiangxi. Mao no doubt had Liu Bocheng and Zhou Enlai in mind when, in "Strategy in China's Revolutionary War", he castigates "those who say that one should only study the experience of the revolutionary war in Russia or, in more concrete terms, that it is enough to act in accordance with the laws that governed the conduct of the civil war in the Soviet Union and to follow the military text-books published by the military institutes of that country". These people, wrote Mao, "do not understand that these laws and text-books reflect the specific character of the civil war in the Soviet Union and that to apply them as they stand, without any changes, would amount, yet again, to 'trimming the foot to fit the shoe' and would lead us to defeat".⁶⁸

However, despite the new high command's desire to turn the Red Army into a regular force on the Soviet model, the defence against the fourth campaign was, as William Dorrell points out, conducted with great caution, and took the weaknesses and strengths of the communist forces into account. Communist assaults on the towns never took on the obstinate quality of the siege of Ganzhou in February-March 1932. The assault on Fuzhou on January 29, 1933, lasted only one day. The attacks on Nanfeng, Lean and Yongfeng lasted only three (February 12-14), six (March 25-30) and 10 days (April 3-13) respectively. Instead of seeking to occupy a town at all costs, the Red Army preferred to retreat whenever it encountered a solid defence. All the communist successes during the fourth campaign (Huangshidu,

67 "Zhongyang renmin weiyuanhui de sanshi hao mingling" (Order No. 30 of the Council of People's Commissars of the Central Government), *Hongse Zhonghua*, No. 36 (October 16, 1932), p. 8.

68 *Xuanji*, p. 165.

Xuwan, Wenhui, Huoyuan, Dongpi, etc.) were obtained through surprise attacks and ambushes.⁶⁹

Since tactical prudence is not incompatible with strategic boldness, it is important not to interpret (as William Dorrill does) this behaviour of the communist forces during the fourth campaign as proof of Mao's persistently dominant position in the Red Army. The communist's strategic plan for the fourth campaign, characterized by an offensive into the white area in order to disorganize the enemy dispositions before they were ready to launch their fourth encirclement campaign, formed part of a total break with the maoist strategy, employed during the first three encirclement campaigns, of luring the enemy deep into Soviet territory before annihilating him.

The fourth counter-campaign, which was conducted by Zhou Enlai with remarkable success, also benefited from favourable circumstances. In January 1933, Japanese forces occupied the Rehe and north Chahar. In March, they launched attacks all along the Great Wall and threatened all of North China, forcing the Guomindang to withdraw a part of its troops engaged in Jiangxi. The result of the fourth campaign undeniably buttressed the position of the Central Committee leaders in general and that of Zhou Enlai in particular in the Chinese Soviet Republic. Not only was Zhou's nomination as general political commissar of the Red Army officially announced on May 8, 1933, but on the same day, Xiang Ying and Bo Gu entered the Revolutionary Military Council. Xiang Ying even became the interim chairman of this Areopagus of military power in the Jiangxi Soviet.⁷⁰

The impact of the Ningdu Conference and the fourth campaign was reflected not only in the appointments of Zhou Enlai and Liu Bocheng as general political commissar and chief of the staff of the Military Council respectively, but also in the drafting of communist strategy. For it was in drawing the conclusions of the experience of the fourth campaign that Zhou Enlai formulated his strategy of "protracted warfare" adopted during the first stage of the fifth campaign. The experience of the fourth campaign was summarized by Zhou Enlai in a major article written on April 1, 1933, the very day that the Red Army lifted the siege of Lean after having attacked it in vain for six days. This article is in the style of a note rapidly drafted by a commander after a battle, and this suggests that Zhou wrote as he felt and was not seeking to write an article in which political and ideological considerations would occupy a major

69 On the unrolling of the different battles during the 4th Encirclement Campaign, see, for the Guomindang version, *Jiaofei Zhanshi* (A History of the Encirclement Campaigns Against the Bandits), 6 Vols., Taipei, Military History Bureau, Ministry of National Defence, 1967, Vol. II, pp. 169-238; and for the CCP version, *Hongse Zhanchang*, (Red Battlefield), June 1933, Chen Cheng Collection, reel 9.

70 "Zhongyang renmin weiyuanhui di sishiyici changhui", document cit.

place.⁷¹ At the outset, Zhou declared himself in favour of a tactical and strategic plan that amounted to a complete break not only with maoist strategy but also with that adopted during the fourth counter-campaign. For the first time, Zhou spoke of building "strongholds" (*yaosai*) in order to defend the Jiangxi Soviet.

"Permanent and semi-permanent strongholds should be built at important strategic and tactical points. They should be defended at all costs and independently (*guli sishou*) by a minimum number of troops. The purpose of this action is twofold: firstly, to provide freedom of movement to our field armies so that they may exploit their opportunities to restrict enemy operations and accomplish their own plans, and secondly, to protect the vast Soviet area so that the enemy no longer dares penetrate into it, and to use our strongholds as supporting positions in order to launch attacks against outside territory. This is the significance of the building of strongholds by the Red Army... In general, we should annihilate the enemy's field armies before dealing with his strongholds. But in certain circumstances, for example when the enemy defends a stronghold after suffering a defeat or when the occupation of a stronghold facilitates movement by our field armies or puts the enemy's dispositions out of operation, the Red Army may first attack a stronghold or attack the enemy's field armies and his strongholds simultaneously".⁷²

It can be seen that in the very height of the fourth campaign, Zhou was already defining the communist strategy for the fifth campaign. But, in 1933, he does not seem to have foreseen the full extent of the blockhouse warfare later imposed on the Red Army by Chiang Kai-shek. His judgment at that time of the enemy's strongholds clearly shows that he underestimated the Guomindang's strength or, what amounts to the same thing, that he overestimated the potential of the Red Army.

It is hardly necessary to underline the fact that this strategic conception of Zhou Enlai's was in direct contradiction with maoist strategy. Moreover, it was very different from the strategy that the Comintern was recommending during the same period for the Jiangxi Red Army. For, in an article published in *Communist International*, Pavel Mif, director of the Far Eastern Department of the Comintern wrote: "The Red Army should protect the Soviet territory. This is especially important with regard to the central Soviet area since the central Soviet Government is temporarily located there. However, in fulfilling this duty, the Red Army should preserve its mobility. Under no circumstances should the Red Army defend specific positions at the cost of sacrificing large numbers of combatants. It should avoid making contact with major, concentrated enemy forces and should lure a part of the

71 Zhou Enlai, "Lun diren de yaosai" (On the Strongholds of the Enemy), *Hongse Zhan-chang*, pp. 80-86.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

enemy forces into the Soviet area in order to create the conditions for decisive victory...Most of the victories of the Red Army were won by adopting this tactic whose essential aim is to preserve the bulk of its forces..."⁷³

At a time when Zhou Enlai was already advocating the building of strongholds to defend the Jiangxi Soviet and believed that the Red Army was capable of simultaneously attacking the enemy's main forces and one of his strongholds, Pavel Mif's military viewpoint appears to be oddly retrograde. But it is not difficult to understand why Mif was one campaign behind the times. The appearance of his article in Ruijin in August 1933 is accompanied by a short note from the editorial board of *Douzheng* which states, among other points that: "Comrade Mif's article was published by the journal *Communist International* in April 1933, i.e. before we had completely broken the enemy's fourth encirclement campaign". It is clear that this sentence was trying to say that Mif's thesis was no longer applicable because the situation had changed since the end of the fourth encirclement campaign. The successes gained in this campaign undoubtedly helped bolster the confidence of the CCP Central Committee leaders in general and that of Zhou Enlai in particular, so much so that for the fifth campaign they envisaged stopping the enemy on the other side of the border, defeating him by striking first and not losing an inch of Soviet territory.

The momentum of the revision of the communist military line, initiated at the Ningdu Conference, prolonged by the fourth campaign and accelerated by the fifth, only came to a halt with the loss of the Chinese Soviet Republic. In a sense, the Ningdu Conference, which deprived Mao of all military power in the Jiangxi Soviet, may paradoxically be regarded as the starting point of his rise to power in the CCP. Given the balance of forces between the Guomindang and the CCP at that time, it seems certain that, whatever the strategic line adopted, the Chinese Soviet Republic could not have been saved. If the Ningdu Conference had not taken place and if the Maoist strategy had continued to be applied, there would have been neither a Long March nor a Zunyi conference or, more probably, there would have been another Long March, very different from the one that we know and another enlarged meeting of the Politburo at which Mao would have stood in the dock instead of playing the prosecutor's role as he did at Zunyi. The Ningdu Conference therefore set up one of those paradoxes typical of history: by provoking the fall of Mao in the Jiangxi Soviet, it prevented him from bearing responsibility for the loss of the Chinese Soviet Republic, thus contributing to his rise to power in Zunyi.

73 Pavel Mif, "Zhongguo geming weiji de xin jieduan" (New Stage of the Revolutionary Crisis in China), *Douzheng* (Struggle), No. 23, (August 22, 1933), pp. 14-15.