



RECALLING THE LONG MARCH

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by Liu Po-cheng and others

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING

First Edition 1978

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1186

WORLD LANGUAGES PRESS

Printed in the People's Republic of China

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THE LONG MARCH

by [illegible] and [illegible]

A QUOTATION FROM CHAIRMAN MAO TSETUNG

The Long March is the first of its kind in the annals of history, . . . it is a manifesto, a propaganda force, a seeding-machine. Since Pan Ku divided the heavens from the earth and the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors reigned, has history ever witnessed a long march such as ours? For twelve months we were under daily reconnaissance and bombing from the skies by scores of planes, while on land we were encircled and pursued, obstructed and intercepted by a huge force of several hundred thousand men, and we encountered untold difficulties and dangers on the way; yet by using our two legs we swept across a distance of more than twenty thousand *li* through the length and breadth of eleven provinces. Let us ask, has history ever known a long march to equal ours? No, never. The Long March is a manifesto. It has proclaimed to the world that the Red Army is an army of heroes, while the imperialists and their running dogs, Chiang

Kai-shek and his like, are impotent. It has proclaimed their utter failure to encircle, pursue, obstruct and intercept us. The Long March is also a propaganda force. It has announced to some 200 million people in eleven provinces that the road of the Red Army is their only road to liberation. Without the Long March, how could the broad masses have learned so quickly about the existence of the great truth which the Red Army embodies? The Long March is also a seeding-machine. In the eleven provinces it has sown many seeds which will sprout, leaf, blossom, and bear fruit, and will yield a harvest in the future. In a word, the Long March has ended with victory for us and defeat for the enemy. Who brought the Long March to victory? The Communist Party. Without the Communist Party, a long march of this kind would have been inconceivable. The Chinese Communist Party, its leadership, its cadres and its members fear no difficulties or hardships. Whoever questions our ability to lead the revolutionary war will fall into the morass of opportunism. A new situation arose as soon as the Long March was over. In the battle of Chihlochen the Central Red Army and the Northwestern Red Army, fighting in fraternal solidarity, shattered the traitor Chiang Kai-shek's campaign of

“encirclement and suppression” against the Shensi-Kansu border area and thus laid the cornerstone for the task undertaken by the Central Committee of the Party, the task of setting up the national headquarters of the revolution in northwestern China.

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Recalling the Long March

Liu Po-cheng

In full two years from October 1934 to October 1936 the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, having left its base areas, undertook the world-shaking 12,500-kilometre Long March.* During the Long March the Red Army captured many strategic points, fought its way across rapid rivers, repulsed vast numbers of pursuing and intercepting enemy troops, crossed towering snow-clad mountains and went through unpopulated marshlands. The courage and endurance shown by the Red Army men fully demonstrates the unquenchable vitality of the communist movement and the all-conquering fighting strength of the army led by the Communist Party.

But why was the Long March necessary, and what had enabled the Red Army triumphantly to complete this great military undertaking? A study of these questions provides rich experience and invaluable lessons.

*It is generally accepted that the Long March took one year, from October 1934 to October 1935, covering the time taken by the First Front Army of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army from Kiangsi to northern Shensi. Actually the period covered by all the three main forces of the Red Army that went north was two years.

The closing of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held in January 1931 marked the beginning of the domination of a "Left" opportunist line — then represented by Wang Ming — in the Party for the third time during the period of the Agrarian Revolution (1927-37). In accordance with the erroneous programme of the Plenary Session, the Party congress of the central base area in November 1931 and the Ningtu Meeting in October 1932 smeared Comrade Mao Tsetung's correct line as a "rich peasant line" and an "error of the most serious and consistent Right opportunism," and the correct Party and military leadership in the central base area was removed. Because of the serious damage the incorrect line had done to the Party's work in the Kuomintang-controlled areas, the provisional central leadership moved to the central base area early in 1933. This facilitated the further application of the incorrect line both there and in the neighbouring base areas.

The "Left" deviationists confused the tasks for the two historical periods of the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution and the distinction between them, and subjectively were anxious to go beyond the democratic revolution; they underestimated the decisive role of the peasants' anti-feudal struggle in the Chinese revolution; and they advocated a policy of opposition to the bourgeoisie as a whole, and even to the upper petty bourgeoisie. The exponents of the third "Left" line went further and put the struggle against the bourgeoisie on a par with the struggle against imperialism and feudalism and totally denied the tremendous change in the domestic political situation brought about by the Japa-

nese invasion of China. They categorically labelled as "the most dangerous enemy" those intermediate groups which had contradictions with the Kuomintang reactionary rule and were taking positive actions. They failed to understand the specific features of semi-colonial and semi-feudal Chinese society. They did not recognize that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in China was in essence a peasant revolution and failed to understand the uneven, tortuous and protracted nature of the Chinese revolution. They therefore underestimated the importance of military struggle, especially the importance of peasant guerrilla warfare and rural base areas, erroneously urging the Red Army to capture key cities.

But, thanks to the profound influence of Comrade Mao Tsetung's correct strategic principles, the Red Army was able to secure victory during its fourth counter-campaign against the Kuomintang's "encirclement and suppression" in the spring of 1933. The victory was achieved before the provisional central leadership's erroneous line had been carried through in the Red Army. On the other hand, an utterly incorrect military line gained complete control in the fifth counter-campaign against "encirclement and suppression" which began at the end of 1933. The Fifth Plenary Session of the Party's Sixth Central Committee called in January 1934 marked the apex of the development of the third "Left" line. Its exponents mistakenly concluded that "the revolutionary crisis in China has reached a new acute stage — an immediate revolutionary situation exists in China" and that the struggle against the fifth "encirclement and suppression" was a "struggle for the complete victory of the Chinese revolution." Militarily, the exponents of the third "Left" line also evolved a fully articulated system. On the question of army building, they reduced the Red Army's threefold task of fighting, doing mass work and production to the single one

of fighting, demanded undue regularization and opposed the then sound guerrilla character and mobility of the Red Army as "guerrilla-ism"; furthermore, they fostered formalism in political work in the army. On the question of military operations, they denied the premise that the enemy was strong and we were weak; they demanded positional warfare and so-called regular warfare, which relied solely on the main forces; they demanded a war of strategic quick decision and protracted fighting in campaigns; they demanded "attack on all fronts" and "strike with two fists"; they opposed luring the enemy in deep and regarded necessary shifts of troops as "retreat and flightism"; and they also demanded fixed battle lines and an absolutely centralized command. In brief, they negated guerrilla warfare and mobile warfare of a guerrilla character and did not understand how to conduct a people's war correctly.

During the fifth counter-campaign against "encirclement and suppression," the "Left" opportunists began with adventurism in attack and, on the ground of a chance victory in the encounter at Hsunkou, dispatched troops into enemy areas and followed the erroneous policy of "engaging the enemy outside the gates."

The Fukien Incident* took place at this time and the enemy was compelled to shift its forces eastward. Had we taken

* Influenced by the Chinese people's anti-Japanese upsurge throughout China, Tsai Ting-kai, Chiang Kuang-nai and other leaders of the Kuomintang's 19th Route Army came to realize the futility of fighting the Red Army. In November 1933, allying themselves with the Kuomintang forces under Li Chi-shen, they publicly renounced Chiang Kai-shek, established the "People's Revolutionary Government of the Republic of China" in Fukien and concluded an agreement with the Red Army to resist Japan and oppose Chiang Kai-shek. This government collapsed in early 1934 under the attacks of Chiang Kai-shek's superior forces. Later, Tsai Ting-kai and others gradually switched over to a position of co-operating with the Communist Party.

effective measures to unite the forces standing for struggle against Chiang Kai-shek and resistance to Japan and waged a joint battle against the Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries, we could have done much to reinforce the ever-growing demands of the people to fight the Japanese invaders and for the institution of democracy in China. At the same time, it was entirely possible for us to make use of the opportunity militarily to wipe out a portion of the enemy forces and smash the enemy's fifth campaign of "encirclement and suppression." But the "Left" opportunists, claiming that the intermediate groups were the so-called most dangerous enemy of the Chinese revolution, lost this excellent opportunity. Thus the Kuomintang reactionaries were able to strangle the Fukien People's Government and unhurriedly turn back to attack the base areas again.

Following the Kuangchang battle in which the Red Army suffered heavy losses, the "Left" opportunists turned to conservatism in defence and proposed dispersing forces to defend important positions. This placed the Red Army in a totally passive position. When it acted to resist at one point, the enemy would attack at another. Thus the Red Army was hard put to cope with the situation and it shrank in size, as did the territory it occupied.

Finally, the "Left" opportunists rejected Chairman Mao's correct proposition to shift the main forces of the Red Army to the exterior lines to manipulate and wipe out enemy forces and defend and expand the base area, and ended up running away. In October 1934 they rashly decided to leave the central base area, and made a hurried shift of position without explaining the reasons to the cadres and the masses. They even failed to make the necessary preparations for the change-over from positional warfare to mobile warfare and

from reliance on the base area to fighting without the base area, and for operations in a long march.

2

Because of the mistake of flightism committed by the "Left" opportunists in military actions, the Red Army continued to suffer great losses even after the Long March had started. The Fifth Army Group of the Central Red Army served for a long time as a rearguard to cover the whole army and its transport columns since it set out from the central base area in the westward movement along the Kwangtung-Kwangsi-Hunan border. The more than 80,000 troops of the whole army made their way along narrow, winding mountain paths. They were under heavy strain as they marched in crowded columns, and it often took them a whole night to cross one mountain ridge. The enemy troops, however, had the advantage as they moved along easier roads. Their progress was much quicker than ours and we could not shake them off our heels.

After fierce fighting, the Red Army finally broke through three enemy cordons. Chiang Kai-shek then hastened to dispatch 400,000 troops in three routes to pursue and intercept the Red Army, in an attempt to wipe it out along the Hsiang-chiang River on the Hunan-Kwangsi border.

Faced with this huge attacking force, the "Leftist" leaders were at the end of their tether. They simply ordered head-on attacks in an attempt to break through, pinning their hopes on being able to join forces with the Second and Sixth army groups of the Red Army. There was a week of bitter battles along the eastern bank of the Hsiangchiang River

south of Chuanhsien County (today's Chuanchow) in northeastern Kwangsi. During these battles a large number of our troops were deployed as a covering force and were thus exposed to enemy attacks. Although they succeeded in breaking through the enemy's fourth cordon and finally crossed the Hsiangchiang River, the price was dreadfully high. More than half the troops were lost.

The repeated setbacks after the fifth counter-campaign against "encirclement and suppression" and the almost hopeless situation at the time provided a sharp contrast with the situation prior to the fourth counter-campaign against "encirclement and suppression." This gradually opened the eyes of the cadres to the fact that these reverses resulted from the rejection of the correct line represented by Comrade Mao Tsetung and the implementation of an erroneous line. The rank and file of the army began to voice doubts and dissatisfaction and earnestly called for a change of leadership. This sentiment increased with our army's setbacks and reached its highest point during the battle along the Hsiangchiang River.

At that time, the Second and Sixth army groups launched a powerful offensive on the Szechuan-Kweichow-Hunan border in order to co-ordinate with the Central Red Army. To forestall the link-up of the Red Army units, Chiang Kai-shek hastily sent large numbers of troops to intercept and pursue us. If the original plan was not to be changed, a decisive battle would have to be fought with an enemy five or six times the size of the Red Army forces. Already greatly depleted, our units were faced with the danger of annihilation if they continued to follow the foolish tactics of engaging a superior enemy force head on.

It was at this critical moment that Chairman Mao came forward with a plan which saved the Red Army. He strenuously advocated abandoning the attempt to join the Second

and Sixth army groups and proposed that the Central Red Army wheel towards Kweichow where the enemy was weak. This would give the Red Army the initiative and enable it to win several battles and get some necessary rest. Chairman Mao's proposal won the support of most comrades and the Red Army captured the city of Tungtao, on the southwest border of Hunan, in December and then advanced into Kweichow, taking Liping in southeastern Kweichow at one blow. Had it not been for Chairman Mao's firm demand for a change of policy, the remaining 30,000-some Red Army men would have been wiped out.

The Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee held a meeting at Liping and resolved to march further into weakly-defended Kweichow Province. After regrouping, the Red Army resumed its journey and, in January 1935, forced the Wuchiang River and took Tsunyi in northern Kweichow. It was a period of intense marching and fighting but all military operations were conducted smoothly and the army's morale rose higher and higher, thanks to Chairman Mao's brilliant policy.

At Tsunyi, the Red Army began a 12-day programme of rest and consolidation. An enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee was held in this period.

3

The Tsunyi Meeting concentrated its efforts on rectifying the military and organizational errors that were a decisive factor at the time. The "Leftist" leaders had attempted to replace guerrilla and mobile warfare with positional warfare