

Canton Commune - Dec1927

by Ah Xiang

[Excerpts from "Red Terror & White Terror"]

In Guangzhou, Zhang Taile, an early communism activists who followed Yang Jingzai to Russian Far East for reporting China's communism activity to the Comintern in Spring of 1921 and later attended Comintern Third Congress in Moscow in June of 1921, led an uprising against Zhang Fakui by taking advantage of Zhang Fakui's campaign against Li Lishen (chief of 4th Corps) and Huang Shaohong's Guangxi Province Army. Zhang Fakui attacked Li Jishen on Nov 17th 1927 and took over control of Canton. Li Jishen's army counter-attacked Zhang Fakui from Shantou to the east and Wuzhou to the west.

The uprising, originally scheduled for Dec 13th, pulled ahead due to divulSION of the scheme. Before that, Xu Xiangqian had arrived in Guangzhou (Canton) from Shanghai in late September and was responsible for training workers' armed forces. Two thousand workers were involved in the uprising. Comintern representatives, i.e., Heinz Newmann & Gerbart Eisler, and Russian deputy consul Abram I. Hassis, were directly involved in organization and leadership. CCP leaders, Zhang Taile, Su Zhaozheng, Ye Ting, Ye Jianying, Zhou Wenyong and Nie Rongzhen organized a three-route uprising on the early morning of Dec 11th 1927. Xu Xiangqian recalled that communists encountered resistance at Li Jishen Residency. CCP declared the founding of 'Canton Soviet Government' at the site of police bureau, with three Russians [possibly counting German Comintern representative as Russian] being on scene. Chairman of this Canton Commune would be Su Zhaozheng, commander Ye Ting, and military tactician Xu Guangying. Zhang Yufa pointed out that Chinese communists, beginning with Peng Pai's Soviet in Haifeng county on Nov 27th 1927, would discard the banner of KMT Left-wing altogether. With the help of Ye Ting's remnants from Nanchang Uprising, Chen Shunyi & Peng Pai established the "Worker-Peasant-Soldier Soviet Of Haifeng & Lufeng" after two failures in April-May & early September, consecutively.

This would be a last blow to remnant KMT leftist leadership which befriended CCP. CCP had saved its military forces as a result of Ye Jianying's manoeuvres in front of Zhang Fakui. Ye Jianying first saved the communist-dominated "Wuhan Branch of KMT Central Military Political Academy" by suggesting to Zhang Fakui that Zhang Fakui take over custody of the 1300-member body from Tang Shengzhi, and after Aug 1st 1927, Ye Jianying managed to have Zhang Fakui re-arm them twice on the pretext that communists could be utilized for fighting Zhang Fakui's political enemies. Zhang Fakui was recorded to have disarmed this regiment (i.e., 'officer teaching regiment') two times after Aug 1st communist rebellion.

Chiang Kai-shek called upon Gui-xi and Yue-xi armies to reconcile with each other for sake of fighting the communist insurgents. While CCP was busy launching the ceremony for Canton Commune around noon, a regiment of KMT forces under Xue Yue, which stationed at Chenjiasi of Canton, launched an attack at Guanyinshan Mountain. KMT forces under Ye Ju and Li Fulin (5th Corps) counter-attacked Canton from Pearl River to the south and Shaoguan to the north. The two Li Fulin regiments marched along Canton-Kowloon Railway Line. North of Pearl River, Li Dexuan led the "athlete column" of the mechanic worker union against CCP rebels. Xu Xiangqian stated that imperialists on Zhujiang River

bombarded communist positions as well as dispatched marines ashore. Li Fulin attempted 4 crossings of the Pearl River at two places on the morning of Dec 12th. By 11:00 am, Zhou Dingkuan regiment under Li Fulin assisted in the attack at Mt Guanyinshan. Around 1-2 pm, Xue Yue took over Mt Guanyinshan (aka Mt Yuexiushan). Xu Xiangqian led a counter-charge in retaking it. When more Zhang Fakui forces counter-attacked Guangzhou, Ye Ting proposed a retreat to the countryside, but Comintern rep Heinz Neumann advocated for a defense of the city lane by lane. Zhang Taile died in an ambush in the hands of "machinist union" on the afternoon of Dec 12th. CCP retreated out of Canton by the afternoon of Dec 13th. Russian consul Hassis was later captured and executed by KMT. Recent research pointed out that Russian's insistence on defending Canton was for securing the seaport so that USSR could ship over military supplies, and the initial retreat along coastal Haifeng and Lufeng areas followed the same contemplation.

After losing Mt Guanyinshan, Xu Xiangqian returned to the headquarter, only to find it vacant. Xu Xiangqian, after grabbing some money that was left on the table by the fleeing communists, followed remnants to Huanghuagang Hill where they found out that communists had departed earlier for Huaxian county. Xu Xiangqian recalled that several dozen women students, under You Xi, fought against KMT forces as a result of not knowing of the retreat, and those women died to the last person. Ye Ting fled to HK and then onward to Moscow where he was rebuked by Comintern. (Wen Yu mentioned that Ye Ting left for Germany where he opened a 'tofu' shop for making a living.)

Innumerable people died in Guangzhou, often depicted like 'blood flowing like a stream'. Zhang Yufa pointed that Zhang Fakui's army killed several thousands of rebels. Alternative sources pointed to chaotic killing as a result of Cantonese citizens mistakenly wearing the red-color arm band for avoidance of communist purge. Xu Xiangqian also mentioned that about 7000 people, on communist suspicion or on clothing or accent suspicion, were killed by KMT within three days. Not all communists were executed though. Senior CCP cadre Song Shilun [aka Zhang Ziguang] would be imprisoned till the second half of 1929, after which time Song Shilun went to Shanghai where he was unemployed till Dong Zhujun of Jinjiang [King Kong] Restaurant & Hotel gave him financial assistance around 1935.

<http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/hallas/works/1979/trotsky/ch1.htm> stated that "five thousand communists, mostly local workers, took part in the rising... This "Canton Commune" was crushed in approximately the same time it had taken to crush Blanqui's insurrection in Paris in 1839 – two days ... The outcome was a massacre even greater than that of Shanghai. The CCP ceased to exist in Canton." I have no clue how 'five thousand' and 'local workers' were derived. Please note that Zhang Fakui's "teaching regiment" (1300 soldiers) & "garrison regiment" already boasted of few thousand soldiers. Records showed that altogether two communist-dominated regiments, i.e., 'officer teaching regiment' and 'garrison regiment' (both subordinate to Li Jishen's KMT 4th Corps), had participated in Canton Uprising. The 'officer teaching regiment' was established on basis of Wuhan Branch of KMT Central Military Political Academy. The 'garrison regiment' was established by Zhang Fakui in Nov 1927 in Canton at the suggestion of Ye Jianying. Ye Jianying, military tactician to the 4th Corps, additionally recruited 300 workers (formerly HK-Guangdong Strike veterans) as the 3rd battalion. Both 'officer teaching regiment' and the 3rd battalion of 'garrison regiment', numbering about 2000, joined the Canton uprising. Xu Xiangqian stated that garrison regiment, cannons regiment and part of Whampoa Garrison Battalion joined the 'officer teaching regiment' in the rebellion. Xu Xiangqian, responsible for training workers, disclosed that he had received only a few pistols delivered by a woman in a basket prior to the uprising.