

LAST BASTION

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It is tempting to describe the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, culminating in the bloody massacre of 4 June, as the spark that lit the wick of the bomb that eventually exploded Eastern Europe and ended the Cold War.

As far as the communist world goes, China hasn't done too badly. It has had its economic reforms—its open door policy—for the last ten years, and for a time even talked about political reform. But still, like all the other stalinist regimes, the Chinese leadership has lost its way and popular support. Tiananmen was not a triumph for the Chinese leadership but rather a watershed.

In this special supplement on China we examine the positions the leadership has adopted in ideology, economics and foreign and social affairs since the massacre. A major theme running through the pieces is that the leadership is running out of ideas; it looks to the past for solutions for the future. The attempts of the ancient leaders, and their younger proteges, to appear united,

firm and confident are working for the moment, but are fooling nobody. Most know that the handful of old men—Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Wang Zhen, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun—are holding on to power by a thread, and that events will move rapidly upon their deaths.

In some ways Tiananmen has meant the eclipse of Deng Xiaoping. Where Deng was once hailed as the author of economic reforms, it is now 'Chen Yun Thought' that is credited. Chen Yun finally controls economic policy; he thought it would be sufficient to 'cage' (plan) the 'bird' (they call it a commodity economy, but it bears an uncanny resemblance to a market economy), but fundamental problems like inflation, unemployment and supply of raw materials remain.

Certainly the austerity measures introduced in September 1988 eased these problems, but cannot provide permanent solutions, especially when the leaders are keen not to fuel discontent among the people. In the past year the economy has begun to grow again, but growth has annoyingly occurred in the private sector,

the very area the government had wanted to kill.

In the area of international relations, too, China seems devoid of initiatives. During the Cold War era, China was the "third force" that balanced the superpowers, a position which afforded it a measure of respect and prestige on the world stage. Until Tiananmen, China was perceived by the West as being scarcely communist at all, and everyone was eager to do business. Now China, while still wanting to convince the West that its 'door is open', wants to persuade the remnants of the communist world that it, perhaps alone, holds the true faith. Last year it dismissed the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as "serious setbacks in the development of socialism".

If only affairs of state were a game of *wei qi* (go), the old men could play to their heart's content. In the meantime China waits while the old men fiddle.

— Kitty Eggerking