



Out of steam

For all intents, the Chinese leadership is energetic and united. But it is a fragile mask, plastered with tired slogans and contorted ideology, writes Nick Knight.

On the wake of the dramatic events of June 1989, the reshuffled leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has moved to reinforce its tarnished legitimacy through breathing new life into the official ideology, marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought.

In doing so, the triumvirate of Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and Jiang Zemin has not so much had to formulate new ideological themes as resurrect slogans, values and concepts which were already part and parcel of Chinese marxism, but whose influence had declined as a result of the pragmatic economic policies pursued throughout the 1980s.

These economic policies witnessed in agriculture a return to a household-based production system and the dismantling of the communes; in industry increased

prerogatives to managers and an emphasis on profitability, the encouragement of private ownership, and the opening of the Chinese economy to investment and technology transfer from the capitalist West. There can be no doubt that the retreat from socialism in China in the economic realm, and the 'get rich' mentality fostered by the CCP, led to a high level of cynicism among the population at large and among many intellectuals and party cadres towards the party's rhetoric on ideological issues, and it is in the face of this cynicism that the party leadership is now pushing the need for political and ideological education to counter the unhealthy tendencies which its own economic policies have engendered.

These exhortations to renewed ideological rectitude are premised on the formulations contained in the resolution on party history passed by the sixth plenum of the eleventh central committee in June 1981. This

resolution, while commenting negatively on the policies and ideas of Mao Zedong during the last two decades of his life, reiterated that marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought remained the guiding and official ideology of the CCP. Mao Zedong thought is the "crystallisation of the collective wisdom of the Party", "a scientific system" to which many of China's leading revolutionaries, especially Deng Xiaoping, have made a significant contribution. In Deng's hands, Mao Zedong thought has been employed as legitimisation of an economic reform program which Mao himself consistently opposed during his own lifetime.

To achieve this, Deng has stressed the importance of "seeking truth from facts" (a slogan which Mao endorsed but which can be used to justify any set of policies, depending on which 'facts' are emphasised), and the establishment of a form of socialism with Chinese charac-

teristics (again, an open-ended conception which can be redefined to suit the policies of the day).

The notion of Mao Zedong thought as a developing system of thought to which other Chinese leaders can contribute has allowed it to be readily mobilised by the current leadership in defence of its actions in the wake of the events of mid-1989. In particular, the current leadership has drawn on those themes within Mao Zedong thought compatible with a continuation of the economic reforms and a stress on social stability and party leadership. In other words, despite some flirtation with increased centralisation of the economy towards the end of 1989, Li Peng and Jiang Zemin have made it clear that the general thrust of the reforms of the 1980s, including opening China to the world, will continue. What will alter will be a tightening of party leadership, an increased emphasis on political and ideological work, and the inculcation of values which will reinforce the social stability which the economic reforms themselves threaten.

This can be seen clearly in the sort of values being promoted. One of the most significant of these is patriotism. Li Ruihuan, a member of the standing committee of the party's Politburo, emphasised the importance of patriotism in a major speech in May 1990 on political and ideological work. He commented: "Under the present new historical situation of building socialism in China, our emphasis on the importance of ideological and political work is intended to inspire the people to cultivate a dedicated and profound sense of patriotism for our great motherland and enhance their national pride and confidence." Education in patriotism is to be carried out in primary and middle schools, in organisations such as the Communist Youth League and Young Pioneers, and in party cadre schools; and this emphasis on patriotism, particularly among Chinese youth, is clearly intended to undercut the appeals to patriotism expressed by students of the pro-democracy movement prior to June 1989, a movement now roundly con-

demned as counter-revolutionary and not at all patriotic.

It is also very clear that a conscious attempt is being made by party leaders to link the idea of patriotism with the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics. To achieve this, the Chinese populace is being reminded of the virtues exhibited by the party and the sacrifices it made during the anti-Japanese War of 1937-45. The Yan'an spirit incorporates the values of patriotism, frugal living and hard struggle, self-reliance and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the collective good, party discipline, and a commitment to the study of marxist theory and to its integration with the realities of China's revolutionary struggle. Party cadres are also being reminded of the importance of the mass-line, a principle for party leadership formulated by Mao during the Yan'an period, which insists on close contact between cadres and masses, something which the present party leaders admit has been neglected during recent years. A further experience from the Yan'an period to be revived is the party rectification campaign of 1942-44, during which cadres underwent intensive education in the party's history and policies, and in the sinified marxism endorsed by Mao. The push for the study of marxist theory sanctioned by this earlier campaign is being reproduced in the context of the current party consolidation campaign in which cadres are exhorted to study marxism and to rectify bad styles of work.

The Yan'an spirit has thus been used as a multifaceted model for emulation over the past year. Another model from the Maoist past which has had new life breathed into it is Lei Feng (see box).

The struggle against 'bourgeois liberalisation' has been one of the most evident aspects of the response of China's leaders to the events of 1989 but, as with exhortations to learn from Lei Feng, the current leadership is resuscitating an already existing campaign rather than launching a new one. 'Bourgeois liberalisation' is perceived as an ideological trend which is hostile to socialism and excessively sym-



Lei Feng

is reputed to have been a young soldier whose life in every respect constituted a model of socialist probity; his thoughts, recorded in a diary, demonstrated boundless devotion and loyalty to Chairman Mao and the party; his actions, from the most menial to the ultimate sacrifice of his life in the people's cause, represented the ideal of subjection of self to the pursuit of the collective good. Mao Zedong launched the first 'Learn from Lei Feng' campaign in 1963, and since then the model hero has been trotted out from time to time. While the campaign proceeded fitfully and without much apparent success during the 1980s, it has moved into top gear since June 1989 as the party leadership has attempted to counter the negative influence of bourgeois liberalisation, a trend of thought within Chinese society which it regards as primarily responsible for all the deleterious ideological and political manifestations which culminated in the "counter-revolutionary turmoil" of mid-1989.

The 'four cardinal principles'

involve keeping to the socialist road, upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, and upholding marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought.



pathetic to Western concepts of freedom and democracy, a trend which has become increasingly pervasive during the 1980s. As Wang Renzhi, director of the party's propaganda department, complained in a speech in February 1990, "advocates of (bourgeois) liberalisation began with concocting and peddling all kinds of reactionary views gradually to erode and seize extensive ground in the realms of theory, literature and the arts, journalism, publications, and education".

What is interesting about Wang's analysis of 'bourgeois liberalisation' is that he attempts a class analysis of its origins; the 'middle class', generated by the increased prosperity brought about by China's economic reforms, is the social base from which this ideological trend has sprung. Consequently, not only should the phenomena of 'bourgeois liberalisation' and the 'counter-revolutionary rebellion' of 1989 be looked at with a "marxist class viewpoint and using a class analytical method", it should be countered through the use of class struggle. In suggesting the need for class struggle to combat 'bourgeois liberalisation', Wang and other leaders have reiterated a formula coined by Mao in 1957 at the time of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign: while the large-scale class struggles of the past have by and large come to an end, class struggle will continue to exist "within certain limits for a long time to come and many even grow acute under certain conditions". It is

somewhat ironical, however, that while Wang recognises that the economic reforms of the 1980s have had an impact on China's class structure, producing what he describes as a "middle class" responsible for generating the ideological trend of 'bourgeois liberalisation', neither he nor any of the other Chinese leaders has challenged the essential thrust of those reforms, choosing rather to combat the unrest and dissatisfaction the reforms have caused through increased ideological and political education, and tighter party control over political and cultural life.

If 'bourgeois liberalisation' has been roundly denounced as all that is negative, the 'four cardinal principles' have been projected as the fundamental and unchallengeable values which will safeguard socialism in China. These principles had been a major theme in the speeches and writings of Deng Xiaoping throughout the 1980s, and had been employed previously as a counter to the negative impact of 'bourgeois liberalisation', although they were progressively honoured more in the breach than in the observance. However, the threat posed by the democracy movement of 1989 has seen a stiffening of resolve on the part of China's leadership to ensure that they do in fact represent the guiding principles which govern political life in China. Consequently, Deng Xiaoping's past writings on this topic have appeared continually in the Chinese press, and virtually all pronouncements on ideological matters contain reference to the centrality of the 'four cardinal principles'. They have clearly become the touchstone by which affairs in the realms of art, literature, education, journalism and politics must be conducted and will be judged, and anyone deviating from them runs the risk of being branded guilty of 'bourgeois liberalisation'.

The upheavals of 1989 and the crushing of the pro-democracy movement have thus resulted in a return within the ideological realm to what are regarded by China's leadership as the fundamental truths of marxism; and these truths are being disseminated through a major campaign to study marxist

theory. Cadres and soldiers are once again obliged to undertake political education, and to study the works of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and the classics of marxism. Similarly, because there has been much concern over the ideological standard of tertiary students, political education classes have been reintroduced to the curriculum, and at Beijing University first-year students are now obliged to undertake a year-long course in military and political training before embarking on their specialist courses.

However, one wonders how effective in the long-term this pressure by the party's leadership to study marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought will be. The root cause of the ideological trend of 'bourgeois liberalisation' which it finds so threatening can be traced back, in my view, to the climate created by its own economic reforms of the 1980s, a climate in which corruption flourished, in which the values of competition and consumerism were endorsed, and in which increasing inequality was accepted as a necessary price to pay for economic modernisation; opening to the capitalist West and the destruction of collectivist institutions and ethos were similarly rationalised by reference to the imperative to expand China's productive forces at whatever cost.

The contradictions and tensions generated in the economic realm were inevitably reflected in the ideological realm, and gave rise to a deep dissatisfaction with the party's political and ideological leadership. It remains to be seen whether the party can, for any sustained period, persist with much the same mix of economic policies while insisting on its ideological rectitude through appeals to marxist theory. If the party manages to do so, it will be through its increased reliance on coercive measures, for the greater the gap between its economic policies and its ideological rhetoric the more it will be compelled to resort to repression to compensate for its loss of legitimacy in the realm of ideology.

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