

The force of words

China's police take up a new weapon — old words — against crime. Michael Dutton looks at the campaign.

Hollywood moguls are not the only ones to create the illusion of a time warp. The Chinese public security forces are proving to be something of a deft hand at this also as their latest production—the campaign against moral and economic crime—amply demonstrates.

In the Chinese production though, it is not Michael J. Fox who plays the leading role but that 'unrustable screw', the boy scout of the Chinese Communist Party, Lei Feng, who gets star billing. Moreover, the Chinese production features no sophisticated futuristic machine to transport people across time. Instead, it is the technologies and mechanisms of the past which are being 'transported' into the present to create the illusion of a socialist transition.

The old Mao-style political campaign and Maoist mass line strategies have made a comeback as policing strategies. They are joined,

in the post-Tiananmen massacre period, by a renewed emphasis upon ideological work and the purity of the past. It is this ideological purity which is now said to guarantee China's socialist future.

The utilisation of past models and mechanisms to deal with new problems is not confined to the realm of propaganda. As mentioned previously it has also featured prominently in Chinese police strategies. Long before the massacre, Chinese police were resorting to a combination of Maoist-style mass-line techniques and campaigns coupled with new draconian penalties to deal with a rising rate of crime which they blamed on the economic reform program. New criminal forms seemed to be taking shape and, in order to deal with these, a number of innovations were attempted, the most important of which were:

- * harsher penalties for those crimes which were targeted by the police,
- * intermittent large scale campaigns against these target crimes,



* the strengthening and extension of the role of the mass-line organisations.

To redress the problem of city-based recidivism—said to have become serious in the economic reform period—a form of banishment was introduced: targeted criminals would be forced to remain at the prison site even after their sentences had been completed. While this policy was in itself nothing new, its more specialised use against certain target criminal activity was. In the early 1980s the targeted criminal group was the city-based recidivist. By 1984 a new target emerged—city-based criminals who had been rounded up in the 1983 campaign against street crime and, after the 4 June disturbances, political activists in Beijing were also reported to have been targeted.

Attempts to introduce banishment as a means of solving target crime, however, were invariably short lived. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, such measures were increasingly opposed by the prison

authorities themselves for such policies made the task of controlling the prison more difficult. After all, criminals targeted for this special treatment had little to gain from being model prisoners and instead quite often became disruptive. Secondly, for community police there was limited propaganda value in such measures. Because of their draconian nature and China's fear of international criticism such policies were never made public. As they remained secret the deterrent effect of such measures was limited. Consequently, for the community, police publicly promulgated harsher penalties for target crimes coupled with politico-educational campaigns around the issue as the way forward. It is this type of campaign style policing which was pursued throughout the reform period and has been a prominent feature of the post-4 June policing strategy.

At the 3rd plenum of the 11th central committee in 1978, Premier Hua Guofeng signalled the end of mass style campaigns. "Large scale turbulent class struggle of a mass kind," he said, "had, in the main, come to an end." In saying this, Hua was only partly right. Since the 'technology' of the campaign found a new home in the mass-line policing strategies of the Public Security Ministry. The best example of this large scale turbulent campaign style policing was the 1983 campaign against street crime. The 1983 campaign was predicated on certain legal changes designed to facilitate easier arrests, detentions and prosecutions of target criminal groups. Sections of the criminal code were suspended, the sentences for certain types of crime increased dramatically and the trial procedures speeded up. The right of defence and the right of appeal were limited. This campaign proved to be something of a model for later policing campaigns.

There are clear indications that similar sorts of methods have been adopted both in the campaign against the pro-democracy movement and in the long running campaign against corruption. While few details of the former campaign have been officially announced, the party has been only too keen to highlight the scale and success of the drive

against corruption. Consequently, the Chinese press reported that between January and June 1989, some 64,584 cases of corruption were investigated leading to over 10,000 convictions. In releasing such figures, the party hopes to demonstrate that it is actively campaigning against one of the central concerns of the pro-democracy Tiananmen demonstrators: cadre corruption. The anti-corruption campaign, then, is part of a party campaign to re-legitimise its role in the aftermath of 4 June. Thus, while the anti-corruption campaign appears as a policing activity, its political dimensions are never far from the surface.

Similarly, the campaign against 'the six evils' (*liu hai*) cannot be regarded as apolitical. This campaign against the evils of prostitution, pornography, trading in women and children, growing, using and trading in narcotics, gambling and engaging in superstitious activities should be seen as part of the party's attempt (along with the resurrection of Mao and Lei Feng) to reassert its moral leadership. By May 1989 the 'six evils' campaign and the drive against corruption were wed into a single and much bigger campaign; the *yan da* or severe strike campaign. This campaign is said by Amnesty International to be the "most severe crack-down on crime since 1983".

While there is little doubt that such campaigns signal the erosion of legal rights for the target criminal group there is much more doubt surrounding their long-term utility in reducing the crime rate. After all, the 'campaign' as a technique by which to mobilise and politicise 'the masses' clearly wasn't all that successful in the past. In hindsight, it is clear that the Maoist political campaigns of the past had little long term effect upon those within the party said to be 'taking the capitalist road'. Similarly, the campaign style of policing currently employed appears to be having only a limited, temporary effect on the target criminal group. More importantly, in relation to the current drive against corruption, it is debatable whether the campaign style of policing is even a suitable response to this type of crime. After all, the

'campaign' as a mass line technique drawn from the Maoist, populist past leads more toward the community than toward the higher echelons of the party. Yet it is precisely this latter domain that is most in need of policing if the popular complaints about cadre corruption are to be addressed. It is in this respect that one discovers the limits of the mass-line. Yet it is this mass line in policing which, in many respects, has become critically important in the period of economic reform.

There is little doubt as to the importance of the so-called mass line organisations in current policing strategies. The neighbourhood committees, their public security committees and public security small groups and pacts play a critical role in community policing. They are, in fact, the backbone of local community policing. An examination of China's policing figures explains why. China has an extremely low ratio of police to people: 6 per 10,000 in the PRC as opposed to Taiwan with 26 (1985 figures) per 10,000, the Soviet Union with 36, Britain with 25 and the United States with 28 per 10,000. The neighbourhood committee is therefore an important instrument by which to maintain social order in China. This was the case before economic reform and there are clear indications that, as a result of economic reform, the duties of these committees have actually increased.

As police workloads have increased and the nature of crime has changed, neighbourhood committees have been called upon to take over work previously the preserve of the regular police force. City based household registration is but one example; in many cities now it is the neighbourhood committees which more or less administer it. Apart from such mundane duties the neighbourhood committee has also been called upon to fulfil new roles. Now they are required by law to help maintain social order, help police the birth control policy and help educate the neighbourhood youth. One of the ironies of the economic reform process was that it resulted in the strengthening of the mass line organisations rather than their dis-

appearance. It should be noted, however, that the mass-line in policing was strengthened, not as a result of the triumphant march forward of socialism but, on the contrary, of a crisis in policing brought on by economic reform.

Will such resurrections, then, lead China 'back to the future', back to a popular/populist form of socialism? Probably not, although these measures will continue to function adequately, to be maintained and even extended. Campaigns will lower—albeit temporarily—certain types of crime and the expanded role

of the neighbourhood committees will aid the police in maintaining social order in the community. What the mass line in policing is less competent at doing—and in the present political climate this is possibly a fatal flaw—is policing middle and high ranking party and government officials who are involved in corrupt practices.

The ultimate question, then, is not whether we go 'back to the future' but whether the mass line in policing is capable of doing anything other than policing the masses. To construct a means of policing the

higher echelons of the party would require a degree of political movement the current leadership is clearly not willing to countenance. In place of reform, the current leadership offers to resurrect Lei Feng and Mao. For all too many Chinese, however, Lei Feng and Mao are not a means by which China can go 'back to the future' but are themselves back in the past. For all too many Chinese, it's now time to move forward.

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Maintaining the rage

A small voice of dissent can still be heard in China, and, according to Linda Jaivin, it's becoming louder, without, it seems, the party cadres noticing.

There's nothing like rock 'n roll fever to warm up those cold Beijing nights. Last February, braving sleet and biting winds, fans pocked the 18,000-seat Workers' Stadium two nights in a row for China's first rock festival. Performing were six of the best of the capital's 30-odd local bands: the all-female Cobra, the heavy-metal Tang Dynasty, Breath, Circumstances, ADO, and 1989.

When Wei Hua, lead singer of Breath belted out her signature tune, "Don't Even Think of Stopping Me", the audience exploded. As the former

Central Television newsreader sang, tears streaming down her face, "I will find a way to cast off these ropes and take a hold of life; the sun will shine down on me," the crowd waved burning matches, cigarette lighters and even flaming programs in response.

There's no doubt about it, rock is hot in China. In a sense, *yaogun* (rock 'n roll) is to young urban Chinese today what 'misty poetry' was to Chinese youth of the early 1980s: a secret language defying comprehension by the adult establishment and a shared code for self-expression that implicitly rejects the values of official culture. Even in its heyday, however, misty poetry enjoyed a limited audience at best; rock reaches the masses. And you can dance to it.

Rock in China has come a long way since April 1985, when British pop group Wham staged the nation's first rock concert and the few brave fans who tried to dance in the aisles were dragged off by police. Few observers could then have imagined that, within a few years, China would boast a fully fledged rock scene, complete with home-grown bands,

commanding legions of screaming fans.

Cui Jian, China's No. 1 rock star, a one-man phenomenon in faded army fatigues and work boots who writes songs with titles like "Rock for the New Long March" was one of the sparks that ignited the prairie fire of rock. A former trumpeter with the Beijing Philharmonic, the baby-faced Mr Cui appeared on Beijing's Central Television in November 1985 singing what is still an enduringly popular tune, "Nothing to my Name".

I want to give you hope
I want to help make you free
But all you ever do is laugh at me,
'cause
I've got nothing to my name.

A trend was born. Beijing quickly became the Jinggangshan of Chinese rock, a revolutionary base area, if you will, from which the rock message was spread. While rock has reached many areas of the country, including Lhasa, it remains primarily an urban phenomenon. The secret of rock's appeal was hinted at in the 1988 short story "The Rock 'n Roll