

In late 1983 a series of police sweeps was instituted as part of a general crack-down on street crime in China. To facilitate such police action, key sections of the Constitution were suspended. Emergency measures were invoked, increasing dramatically the type of sentences which could be meted out for those crimes targetted in this campaign. In addition, the procedures for dealing with these elements were 'speeded up'. Summonses were no longer necessary and details of the charges were no longer forwarded to the defendant's counsel. The right of appeal was severely limited. Arbitrary arrest and, in some cases, execution of criminal gangs and so-called 'hoodlum elements' followed. Reportedly, quotas were set for the arrest and execution of corrupt and criminal elements. It has been estimated that some 100,000 people were arrested in these nationwide sweeps. Legally defined rights were denied to the accused criminal and the convicted criminal in this campaign.

All this was fine as far as the general public was concerned, so long as the

erosion of rights was confined to marginal, criminal and generally undesirable elements in society. The problem is, however, that the erosion of rights which was actively supported by the general public when instituted against hoodlums in 1983 and against prisoners generally has now been turned against significant sections of the population at large.

Perhaps the best way of understanding the structural mechanisms which impel continued incursions of human and legal rights stems from the dissident party theoretician Su Shaozhi.

For Su, neo-authoritarianism arises from feudal remnants. Feudal remnants are a continually reproducing feature of contemporary Chinese society. Nor are corruption and official malevolence, as some party bureaucrats would have it, a result of the reforms or of the 'open door' and western decadence. While, arguably, western influence has its decadent effects, the primary cause lies in the continuing fusion of political and economic structures.

The fusion of state, party and economy creates a situation where all goals become subservient to the political. In a situation where the party maintains 'iron' laws of discipline, normal and non-threatening dissent becomes illegitimate. In fact, neo-authoritarianism becomes a continuing temptation. This becomes especially prevalent when the party is unable to lay down ground rules for freedom of expression. Part of this difficulty arises from 'orthodox marxism' subsuming politics to considerations of class. Many questions arise which are not amenable to a class reductionist framework. Political practice should recognise these and allow a degree of political pluralism where interest groups can express their concerns.

Su Shaozhi and other dissidents such as Wang Ruoshui have little advice as to how legitimate criticism can be distinguished from illegitimate. This, we might add, is not a simple problem and it does not only affect 'socialist' regimes. The boundaries of legitimate dissent are equally as obscure in

Two Myths of the Beijing Massacre

Some on the left seem beholden to two myths connected with the Beijing massacre in June.

The first is that the students' sole genuine demand was the elimination of corruption and, therefore, that the call for democracy was merely a genuflection to their naive view of the west.

Indeed, the argument goes, the fact that the students sang *The Internationale*, praised Gorbachev and did *not* call for the overthrow of the Chinese Communist Party showed they were not interested in widening Chinese democracy or human rights.

Wrong. While students, like workers and intellectuals, strongly opposed corrupt practices, such as the operation of foreign bank accounts by senior leaders, they also perceived the direct link between democracy and corruption.

The rigid, hierarchical structure of Chinese society encourages almost feudal-like networks of patronage, all leading towards the centre. The Chinese party-state has been described by one writer as "a stratified system of corruption". Critically, there is no democratic check on bureaucrats, senior party leaders or the party itself.

Our own parallel, albeit on a milder scale, is Queensland, where Commissioner Tony Fitzgerald QC has emphasised the link between the state's undemocratic electoral system and the entrenched networks of corruption.

The other, less believable, line peddled by some socialists is that somehow foreign capital was involved in the massacre, or that it would be a beneficiary. In this way, some seem to think, foreign business is implicated in the massacre and the crackdown.

Despite the iniquities, waste and untrammelled economic power usually associated with multinationals, the above argument misses the point, or several points.

Foreign businesses - not to mention foreign embassies - were fired upon by troops in the weeks following the massacre. Even the China International Trade and Investment Corp (CITIC) building, the skyscraper citadel of modern Chinese business and head office to many western companies, was strafed with gunfire. Over this and other similar incidents, no apologies have been issued.

Meanwhile, not only have many foreign businesses withdrawn, but the goodwill which led many of them to China in the first place has evaporated.

Holding the reins of power now in China are those such as Chen Yun, xenophobic old men who despise virtually all of the economic and social advances of 1987-89, including any involvement with foreign capital. As we now see, they are doing their best to turn the clock back.

Robert Clark.