

Brief Spring, Sudden Frost

The democratic movement in China has been crushed. With it has gone, at least for the present, a whole outpouring of original thought in Chinese society. Much of it, ironically, came from within the Communist Party itself. Su Shaozhi, now in hiding, was one of China's leading reformist intellectuals. Here, in a previously unpublished paper exclusive to ALR, he lays out a manifesto for the movement.

Until late 1986 Su Shaozhi was the head of the Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought Institute in the Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. After a series of articles implicitly criticising the Communist Party's style of work, he was sacked, and thereafter was identified by the authorities as a dissident. This hitherto unpublished article, delivered as a lecture in 1987, is the clearest and most detailed expression of Su's views on the need for reform and democracy, and reflects many of the values and goals of the now-suppressed student movement.

For Su, political reform meant democratic reform. For many in the Communist party, however, only a government dominated by a strong leader can bring about economic prosperity. This view, known in China as neo-authoritarianism, has been promoted vigorously in recent years, and in April this year even Deng Xiaoping was quoted as supporting it.

The lack of a theoretical basis is an important reason why it has been difficult to deepen the reforms in Chinese society. We have already done much, but our theory has been either unclear or we have been unprepared to articulate it. This, then, has blocked reform. Vice-Premier Wan Li has already made it clear that the "double one-hundreds principle" is also applicable in the political and policy-making arenas.

A commentator in the *People's Daily* also clearly pointed out: "political problems can be discussed". This

opens the way for the freedom to explore and overcome a number of theoretical dogmas, a task which will be of benefit to the reform of the political system.

Which dogmas of social and political theory have to be overcome in the reform of the political system?

The first is the dogma whereby socialist society is said to be made up of only three forces - the working class, the peasants and the intellectuals - the divisions between which are said to be disappearing. In reality, the analysis of socialist society also needs group stratification, by social groups

In an interview in the liberal *Shanghai World Economic Herald* in the same month, Su made it clear that while he was not opposed to authority per se, he was most definitely hostile to neo-authoritarianism. In the April 24 edition Su and other leading dissident intellectuals called for a re-evaluation of the recently deceased ex-Party secretary Hu Yaobang. This was regarded as a veiled attack on Deng Xiaoping: the issue was banned and the paper temporarily closed. When it did reappear it was without its liberal editor, Qin Benli, sacked for "seriously violating Party discipline".

The bloody suppression of the students in Beijing weeks later, and the waves of arrests which followed, have temporarily silenced the voices of democracy. Su himself has gone into hiding, and there are great fears for his life. Even if the State were to kill or silence Su, however, the issues he raises will still need to be addressed if the Communist Party is to regain the legitimacy it lost in Beijing in June.

or interest groups. Otherwise, the reality of contradictions among the people will not be adequately reflected, and they will not be handled appropriately. How can this sort of division be carried out? Is it to be done on the basis of income? On the basis of one's place in social production? Research and discussion of this is underway in Chinese sociological circles, and this kind of discussion should be permitted and even encouraged.

The second dogma that needs to be overcome is that which asserts that the workers, peasants and intellectuals in

a socialist society are bound by comradesly bonds of mutual co-operation, and that on matters pertaining to politics, morality and justice their views are identical. This sort of "interest monism" needs to be replaced by "interest pluralism". In socialist society there exists three types of interests; social, collective and individual. In socialist society our fundamental interests and long-term interests are of course identical. Nevertheless, there still exists a variety of strata and groups. These strata and groups all have their own immediate interests, individual interests, regional interests and commercial interests - which are not all the same. For instance, workers and peasants have different interests concerning the raising of prices on sideline products. The Party must understand and encourage the expression of each type of viewpoint and criticism. It will formulate its policy decisions much better if it does so by understanding and co-ordinating these various viewpoints.

The third dogma that needs to be done away with is the monistic, absolutist and omnipotent concept of Party leadership. We must get rid of that great all-encompassing unified structure under which the leadership of the Party committee is everything. Party leadership should be exercised over the line, over principles, policy and political ideology; it should raise and examine problems at a macro or strategic level. As for the analysis of specific problems at a more concrete level, we cannot rely on what the Party says and definitely cannot rely on what the Party leadership says. Frequently, there is a very bad tendency whereby Party leaders are seemingly all-powerful. A person serving as a Party leader is suddenly an expert on everything, irrespective of the field; be it cultural, academic, theoretical or whatever. In essence, this is the continuing evil influence of the "golden mouth and jade words" of feudal despotism.

Within this problem there are a number of relations which require re-



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search. One is the relationship between the Party and the law. At a general level one must ask: which is more important, the Party or the law? Our Party constitution stipulates that the Party and Party members must act within the limits of the constitution and the law; they cannot overstep the law. The Party participated in the formation of the constitution, but the constitution is definitely not a Party formulation - rather, it is a formulation of the people. Moreover, the judiciary must be independent. If this is not the case, it will be detrimental to the establishment of a legal system.

Secondly, there is the relationship between the Party and the government. In a great many socialist countries the Party and the government are one: government power becomes Party power. In China the provincial and municipal Party committees have taken complete control of many matters which were originally the preserve of provincial and municipal governments. This actually discourages activism in the regions, and in reality it weakens the Party's

leadership. We should seriously consider comrade Deng Xiaoping's declaration that "the Party and the government are separate". Thirdly, there is the relationship of the Party and the mass organisations. The union movement was, for example, formerly said to be the link between the Party and the masses. If by link is simply meant connection, then there is no problem. If, however, by link is meant conveyor belt, then in reality the union has become a Party structure and has lost its independent capacity to represent the interests of the workers.

To get to the nub of the matter, what needs to be investigated is the way in which the Communist Party has become a Party of power. What needs to be asked is this: in the socialist construction period, when the exploiting class, as a class, has been eliminated, what elements of the Party's work methods drawn from the revolutionary period are now in need of reform, and with which is it worthwhile to persist? I think that in this regard there is a difference between the Party as underground organisation and the Party

as party of government. In the past, in the debates between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin stressed iron discipline while Luxemburg stressed democracy within the Party. The question of who was correct must depend upon concrete analysis. During the Party's underground period, of course Lenin was correct. Without iron discipline, there can be no single line of leadership. With everything passing through democratic discussion, the Party could face destruction. After obtaining power, however, the Communist Party becomes the Party of power, and here Luxemburg is correct. At this time, the key question is the development of internal Party democracy.

The fourth dogma we must get rid of is the view that bourgeois democracy is obsolete. In the past, we considered bourgeois democracy as serving the interests of the capitalist classes and that it was a kind of sham democracy. From a historical perspective, however, the catchcries of bourgeois democracy such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and many of its systems - such as checks and balances, general elections etc - were all advanced by the "third estate" (including the burgeoning bourgeoisie and the working people) in the anti-feudal period. Needless to say, the labouring people really needed those rights - although, during the anti-feudal period the bourgeoisie themselves accepted and supported these demands.

However, things changed after the bourgeoisie had consolidated their hegemonic position. They tried to restrict or eliminate these demands and to change democracy into a sham form. The significant thing about capitalist society today is that those who strive for democratic freedoms, for true elections and a balanced distribution of power, are still the broad masses of the people. Hence we cannot totally reject the forms of democracy in capitalist society.

In the resolution of the Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, there were breakthroughs in

this regard. The resolution stated: "In human history, the the struggle of the newly emerging bourgeoisie and the labouring people against the feudal despotic system, forming the concepts of democracy, freedom, equality and fraternity was a great liberation of the

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human spirit. Marxism critically inherits these bourgeois concepts but also differs from them at the level of principle". We must not allow the right to use the banner of democracy, freedom, equality, fraternity, human rights and humanitarianism to fall unchallenged into the hands of the capitalist nations. These things are, for us, not only banners but things to be strived for. Engels once said: "How can we demand that others give us freedom of speech if we eliminate freedom of speech in our own ranks?" Here, the freedom of speech spoken of by Engels can be extended to democratic freedom.

Finally, a number of doctrinaire readings of marxism concerning social and political theory need to be eradicated. For example, if we continue to say today that "the State is a class tool", then quite clearly this is inadequate. The use of the capitalist State structure lies not only in its ability to oppress, but also in its role in resolving social contradictions, intervening in the economy, and so on. This is even more obviously true in the case of a socialist state. In China the exploiting class, as a class, has already been eliminated, and therefore the State quite naturally cannot be said to be the tool of class oppression. We must simultaneously consider the class and social nature of the state. Under the conditions of socialism we need to especially consider the question of the sociality of the state. The legal system also needs to be considered in this light.

We should encourage research and

discussion into the problems of there form of the political system, and not continually fear the emergence of different opinions. How can a lack of opinions be considered to be "even more democratic"? Can three thousand in favour and none against be regarded as democratic? In reality, there simply cannot be a situation where no-one disagrees: it can only be that those who disagree are never allowed to express their opinions. Moreover, how can unanimity be insisted upon when there are different strata, different groups and different people all with different interests, different needs and different ideological methods? For example, if the government wants to adopt a measure for raising the prices on agricultural sideline products, the peasants will naturally endorse this, while the workers could disagree. We cannot possibly stop the workers from expressing their opinions: we could only adopt suitable measures to satisfactorily resolve the situation. We should not be afraid of people raising their opinions and airing their criticisms. If there are differing opinions it should be possible to discuss them, and discuss them calmly and dispassionately. Only by this method will we find the best result.

Reform is a kind of trail-blazing, of doing things which have not been done before or by others. Therefore one must boldly explore. Who can say that their opinion is definitely accurate or completely correct? This requires discussion, there needs to be contention between different opinions and we need to have the courage to put forward different plans and proposals after which we must search for the finest schemes and promote the development of reform. Opposing the influence of feudalism in political ideology, liberating ideology, smashing dogma and gradually realising a high level of democracy, this then is the historic tendency of our nation's system of political reform.

Translated by David Ball, Michael Dutton, Mark Harrison and Gerald Groot.