

China changes leaders, but not its policy

by Linda de Hoyos

The student "democracy" demonstrations in cities across China over the month of December were part of a set-piece move in an internal power struggle within the leadership of the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China. Of course, if the students had not had significant backing from some section of the national leadership, "they would have been instantly gunned down in the street," as one exile from China put it.

But by Jan. 16, speculation that the December upsurge was linked to high-ranking leaders was confirmed with the announcement of the forced resignation of General Secretary Hu Yao Bang, believed to be the second most powerful man in China after Deng Xiao Ping.

A statement released from a party Central Committee meeting Jan. 16 stated that Hu "made a self-criticism of his mistakes on major issues of political principles in violation of the party's principle of collective leadership." But the tone was not harsh: "Participants in the meeting gave Comrade Hu Yao Bang a serious and comradely criticism and at the same time acknowledged his achievements in work as they were."

Current Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang was named acting secretary general of the party. The qualification of "acting" to his title indicates that the results of the factional battle are yet to be finalized. As of this writing, speculations are that Vice Premier Li Peng, considered a joint asset of both Deng Xiao Ping and his anti-reformist conservative opponents, will be tapped as the next prime minister, but no official word has yet been released from Beijing.

It would be naive to believe that the actual issues of the factional debate in Beijing are centered on the demands for democracy raised by the student movement itself. The overriding debate on policy decisions revolves around China's response to the July 28 speech issued from the Russian-Asian city of Vladivostok by Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachov.

That speech placed full normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union at the top of Moscow's diplomatic agenda.

The Vladivostok Doctrine poses a challenge to Beijing. Is China going to take the opportunity to join in a condominium with the Soviet Union against an increasingly weakened West? If so, will China be thrust again into the unwelcomed position of a subsidiary partner, or can it act to retain its full independence? If it does move in tandem with the Soviet Union, how can China maneuver to continue to enjoy the benefits of relations with the West—the transfer of technology and expertise which the Soviet Union is in no position to contribute to China?

As the Chinese leadership presents itself to the outside world, the aged but vigorous Deng Xiao Ping, who has led the transformation of China's economic relations over the last five years, is opposed by a group of "conservatives" led by orthodox communists headed by fellow elder statesman Chen Yun. This grouping, of which the up-and-coming Li Peng is believed to be a member, favors an alliance with the Soviet Union and a brake on the de-communization of the Chinese economy.

Ousted secretary general Hu Yao Bang, on the other hand, and his successor Zhao, are believed to represent those in China who favor more open relations with West and a greater loosening of economic-social relations, including the effective suppression of the Communist Party bureaucracy in favor of a revived "Mandarin" bureaucracy selected for its technical competence.

The touchstone for these factions is relations with Japan. Although Japan is China's number-one trading partner, Japanese trade and government delegations report that they are unable to win meetings with Chen Yun. The students, in contrast, told interviewers that they do not want China's "reintegration into the Soviet bloc." Moscow response was

published demands that the Chinese leadership act unequivocally to put down the student movement and its embrace of the West.

The democracy movement

The student movement and its demonstrations for democracy represent the mirror-reversal of the Cultural Revolution. The target is the same—the party bureaucracy—but the standpoint is the precise opposite. The demand for democracy is the demand for full freedom for but a small section of the population—the 1% of China's 1.2 billion who receive a higher education. This freedom, the proponents of the democracy movement declare, is necessary if the intellectuals are to be granted conditions in which their potentials can be realized, and with them, the chance for China to emerge in the 21st century as a superpower.

Given the traditional significance of the Mandarin scholar-official ruling class, student protests and campaigns have served as catalysts for change in China. "It is the tradition," explains one Chinese source, "that when the students of Fudan University in Shanghai University go out, then everyone goes out." Sources with contacts on the mainland report that in the last month, students went out in every university in China.

However, the demonstrations began not in Beijing or Shanghai, but in Hefei, at the Chinese University of Science and Technology. This university, recently upgraded to a "science city" with a \$25 million investment, is the most prestigious scientific education center in China, which provides China with its top scientists. It is this scientific elite that reputedly has had the patronage of Hu Yao Bang.

Hu Yao Bang is also known to have been a close associate of university vice-president Dr. Fang Li Zhi, whose speeches and writings were the inspiration for the December student movement. Dr. Fang, now purged from the Communist Party and from his post in the aftermath of the demonstrations, is an astrophysicist who has traveled widely in the United States and Western Europe, including studies at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies.

In the last six months, Dr. Fang's bold calls for democracy and intellectual freedom in China have appeared in China's press. Dr. Fang is unabashed in his insistence that China's failure to open up to Western ideas and learning will result in its perpetuation as a backward country. In a speech given in November, he declared:

"Do we really have a problem with ideals and with discipline? We certainly do, and that is something else that we intellectuals have to change. . . . Intellectuals themselves represent the cream of society. They should represent the ideals of society. . . . Some people say it is because of our opening to the outside world. I think that's completely wrong. All those who have been outside China would have to admit . . . that discipline, order, morality, and civilization are on a higher level out there than here in China. . . ."

"Another reason [for low morale] is a problem that has existed for many years now with regard to the nature of communist propaganda. I think the greatest problem . . . is that communist propaganda is too exclusive, or perhaps I should say too narrow. As a matter of fact, it is also too shallow. I am also a Communist Party member. But my goals are not so narrow. Our goal is a more rational society. . . ."

"Actually up to now we have had no theory, correct or incorrect that could tell us what our future will be like. We used to say 'socialism.' Now we say 'Chinese-style socialism.' What is 'Chinese-style socialism'? Just a name."

Such calls for a revitalization of China's culture will no longer be heard in the press. Democracy is to be bestowed upon China by the party, and cannot be taken by the intellectuals, the party leaders have pronounced. In the week leading up to Jan. 16, the campaign for political reforms, delayed by the recalcitrance of the Chen Yun faction since July, has been replaced by similarly widespread denunciations of "bourgeois liberalization." Leading the crusade are the mouthpieces of the regional commands of the People's Liberation Army, a bastion of residual resistance to Deng Xiao Ping's reforms.

But it is too early to presume that the democracy movement has resulted in a weakening of Deng Xiao Ping and his reforms, and a strengthening of his opponents. On the surface, Hu Yao Bang's resignation would suggest such an analysis. However, in the same week that Hu, the man pinpointed by Deng as his successor, has been ousted from the party, some of the most far-reaching reforms have gone into effect. As announced Jan. 11 by then-Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang, factory directors and managers are to replace party political committees as the personnel responsible for the management of the nation's factories, as a "major reform of China's enterprise leadership."

So far then, while the conservatives are having their day in the nation's press in the backlash against the student movement, Deng's reforms are proceeding apace. Perhaps the sacrifice, at least temporarily, of Hu Yao Bang, was necessary to clear the way for such reforms. If this is so, Hu's removal has not weakened Deng, but strengthened Deng as the "balancer"—the strongest position in Chinese politics—between two extremes.

There is a third possibility, which can co-exist with either of the first two possibilities. The Chinese leadership is in full agreement that China must assume its rightful place in the world as a superpower empire. To accomplish this China needs technology from the West, while accommodating to the rising power of the Soviet Union in the short to medium term. The ostentatious display of Chinese factionalism—even to the point of bringing students out into the streets—is a message to the "barbarians" that China is rife with factions "to be played." And this is the way, as the United States' attempted use of the "China Card" has proven, the Chinese maneuver to gain the maximum benefit from all.