

Confucian consensus rules at 13th Communist Party of China Congress

by Linda de Hoyos

"Some friends abroad always think that in China there is a reform sector and a conservative sector," stated Zhao Ziyang, the newly elected secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party, in a press conference Nov. 1. "They often base their analysis on the conflict between the so-called two factions and the increase and decrease of power of either faction when they analyze affairs in China. I would say that all those who analyze development in China with this viewpoint will make one mistake after another."

Zhao Ziyang, who is considered a leader of the "reform sector," is not attempting to hide China's reality behind a veil of inscrutability; he is being perfectly straightforward (also see *EIR* Nov. 6, 1987). What appears to Western analysts as a war between two "factions" is but a reflection of the fundamental problems with which the entire Chinese leadership is attempting to grapple, and which were the central issues in the process leading to the 13th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party held in Beijing in late October.

How can China embark on a course of economic development absorbing Western technologies, without at the same time opening the doors to philosophical Westernization that could threaten the grip of the central authorities?

How can China, especially after the annihilation of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, bring its thinkers out of hibernation without at the same time risking the intrusion of intellectual freedom in the domestic political domain—as already happened with the 1987 winter nationwide student riots for democracy?

How can China unleash the entrepreneurial talents of its rural population, aided by direct regional investment from overseas Chinese, without risking the danger of revived political formations (the secret societies) and losing centralized control over the entire process?

How can China modernize without drastically reducing its oversized Communist Party bureaucracy, composed mostly of uneducated peasants? How can Beijing extricate the party from the daily machinery of economics and government, without risking a mass revolt from that peasant bureaucracy?

How can China modernize without challenging the old guards of the People's Liberation Army? How can China modernize its armed forces to levels commensurate with its presumed imperial place in a modern world without transforming the PLA itself?

In short, as Zhao Fusan, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the French newspaper *Le Figaro* Oct. 27, "Party leaders believe that if China follows the capitalist path"—that is, if Beijing acts too rapidly to modernize and change the nation—"we will have another cultural revolution, national chaos"—as a counter-reaction. "That is their anxiety."

The Confucian consensus

These dilemmas are exacerbated by China's own heritage as an imperial empire, in which republican principles of individual freedom and natural law appear to have no theoretical or practical relevance. Instead, China's leaders must rely upon a careful balance of the correlation of social forces if they are to succeed in moving the country forward in the direction agreed upon by the broad consensus of China's leadership.

Although the press is now heralding the Congress as ushering in the new "Zhao Ziyang era," Zhao's own 34,000-character report was the result of an intricate process of discussion and debate. According to the Hong Kong paper *Zhongguo Zinwen She*, Zhao's report was drafted by 19 people, with Zhao taking primary responsibility. "Over 5,000 people participated in the discussions on the drafts of the report. The report was revised seven times, and it took about one year to discuss and finally produce the final draft of the report," reported the Hong Kong daily. "In October last year, the CPC Central Committee began to discuss the keynote of the 13th National Party Congress and agreed that the keynote . . . could only be the reform and opening to the outside world."

There had already been four drafts of the report by August. The fourth draft was sent out throughout the country for discussion among 5,000 people. "In the meantime, the CPC Central Committee also held a symposium attended by responsible persons" to discuss the report. In September 1987, Zhao presented it to the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee. The revised fifth draft was passed by the Politburo on Sept. 30. On Oct. 15, a revised sixth draft was submitted to the 7th Plenary Session of the 12th CPC Central Committee for discussion, and "in accordance with the views expressed at the 7th Plenary Session," the report was revised in 150 places. The seventh draft of the report is that which Zhao

read on Oct. 28 to the Party National Congress.

Through this process, the majority of the party leadership is incorporated into the policymaking process, making it difficult to break ranks later. It is this process of consensus development that determines the personnel changes announced at the congress—rather than the personnel changes dictating the policy. Or, as Zhao stated, the goal of the Congress is “a political, organization, and theoretical guarantee for the long term of the stable continuation of the correct party line.”

Reform of the party

Zhao's report was a straightforward presentation of the problems the leadership faces. China has remained backward, he said, because of an obsolete “political structure” that “no longer conforms with our drive for modernization in economic, political, and cultural and other fields.”

Zhao minced no words in describing China's backwardness. “China has a huge population and a poor foundation to start with, and its per capita GNP still ranks among the lowest in the world,” he reported. China still has more than 700 million people living in rural areas, he said, who “still use handtools to make a living. . . . The scientific and technological level as a whole is low, and nearly one-quarter of the population is still illiterate or semi-literate.”

To remedy this situation, China must complete the “initial stage of socialism,” which Zhao defined as “a period in which an agricultural country whose agricultural population constitutes the majority of its people mainly engaged in manual labor turns step by step into a modern industrial country whose non-agricultural population constitutes the majority of its people.”

To complete this “initial stage,” which Zhao estimates will take 100 years, he presents six tasks for the nation:

- 1) “Concentrate on modernization.”
- 2) “Persist in comprehensive reform”—“Reform is self-perfection of socialist productive relations and superstructure.”
- 3) “Adhere to the open policy”—“By closing the doors to other countries, a country can only become more backward.”
- 4) “A planned commodity economy with public ownership”—“As far as ownership and distribution are concerned, absolute perfection and egalitarianism are not what is required in socialist society” (in contrast to the ideals of the Maoist era).
- 5) “Build democracy . . . step by step and in an orderly way.”
- 6) “Build spiritual civilization”—the watchword for the revival of classical Chinese Confucian culture.

To carry out these tasks, the party must be separated from the government, and the mandarin class of scholar-officials revived. Thus, Zhao announced, in a bold challenge to the 46 million, untutored peasant base of the party, that the government bureaucracy will be turned into a civil service

based on “merit.” In parallel action, 50% of the newly elected Central Committee is college-educated—a major advance over its predecessor.

Intricate maneuvering

The 83-year-old Deng Xiaoping is the orchestrator of the balance of leaders required to carry out the reform mandated in the Zhao report at the pace deemed safe. In an effort to force the resignation of other elderly leaders (including Chen Yun) who are more closely tied to the party, Deng removed himself from the Politburo Standing Committee, from the Central Advisory Committee, and from the Central Committee itself. However, as expected, he remains on the party's Military Commission, to keep his grip on the armed forces, the ultimate source of political power in Beijing. In an attempt to forge ties to the military for Zhao Ziyang, the new secretary general was also named a vice-chairman of the Military Commission.

Raised to the Politburo were several younger leaders, considered leaders of the technocratic strata moving in to implement economic reforms. These include the mayors of Shanghai and Tianjin, economist Wan Li, Japan specialist Tian Jiyun, and other technocrats from Zhao Ziyang's State Council. In a counterbalancing move, the Soviet-trained Li Peng, a protégé of Chen Yun, is expected to be named Chinese premier, soon to replace Zhao Ziyang. But Li Peng vehemently denies a pro-Soviet bias, reported the Indian daily *The Patriot*, and speaks of the Soviet economy as “overcentralized.”

Li Peng was also elected to the powerful Politburo Standing Committee. Indicating the importance given to centralized political authority, Qiao Shi, who supervises China's security and intelligence apparatus, was also named to the Standing Committee and was selected to head the Committee for Discipline Inspection, the party internal security apparatus. Said one diplomat, “If he keeps all these posts, he will become one of China's most powerful men.”

Taking a hard fall were the most vociferous defenders of Maoist ideology, namely, Deng Liqun, who ran the 1983 campaign against the “spiritual pollution” and the 1987 campaign against “bourgeois liberalization.” Although Deng's name figured in the final list for the Central Committee, he was thrown off the Committee in secret ballot at the Congress.

In contrast, Hu Yaobang, who was ousted as party secretary general in early 1987, was retained on the Politburo. Known for his close associations with Japan and his sympathy for China's intellectuals and student movement, Hu had previously been designated as Deng Xiaoping's successor. His career was sacrificed in the aftermath of last winter's student unrest, upon the demands of the military. If one were to view the “factional” spectrum in China as a time-spectrum for the country's development, then Hu's retention on the Politburo is one clear sign of the overall direction in which the majority of China's leaders at least wish to go.