

China's Communist Party fights for its survival

by Linda de Hoyos

As events unfolded in the People's Republic of China since the imposition of martial law by Prime Minister Li Peng on May 19, what has come to the fore is a life and death power struggle in the Chinese Communist Party. At issue is not who will take the reins of power *within* the party; the issue is the very survival of the party itself as the premier and autocratic ruling body over this nation of over 1 billion people.

As of the morning of May 26, Prime Minister Li Peng had re-emerged after six days of silence since his televised demands for martial law May 19, to declare that the party Politburo had decided that the six-week-long student and worker revolution in cities across the country would be put down in order to stop the chaos. To underline his apparent ascendancy to power, Li met with foreign ambassadors in the Great Hall of the People.

Meanwhile, the government once again cut all satellite telecasts, cracked down on foreign reporters' ability to interview Chinese citizens, and jammed Voice of America broadcasts. However, the government appears to be calming the student revolution so far without the use of overt violence, as promised on May 19. Thousands of students in Beijing are being ushered to train stations for return to their native cities. The crowd at Tiananmen Square has reportedly dwindled to 10,000. Chinese students interviewed in the United States declared that with the apparent resolution of the power struggle—at least temporarily—the student movement had lost its immediate purpose and was likely to dissipate, *for a period of time only*.

Within Beijing, rumors are flying at ever faster rates. According to unconfirmed reports, Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang is under house arrest and will be brought up on charges of fomenting an anti-party conspiracy. Also alleged to be in Zhao's camp are Defense Minister Qin

Jiwei; Deputy Premier Tian Jiyun, and other top Zhao aides. Wan Li, president of the National People's Congress, who had met with President George Bush in Washington May 23 and was hyped in the Western press as the reform-minded leader who would take things in hand, no sooner set foot on mainland soil in Shanghai, than he was hustled off to a "hospital," not to be heard from since.

Contradictory reports, however, continue to abound. While these rumors were racing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Li Jinghua told reporters that "Zhao Ziyang is still the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. There have been no changes in the positions of leaders of the Communist Party," she said, including in the all-important Standing Committee.

However, press sources report from Beijing that the "old guard"—84-year-old Deng Xiaoping and his old factional opponent and equally elderly Chen Yun, the political godfather of Li Peng—have taken charge. This is corroborated by Deng's declaration May 26 that an "anti-party group existed that used the students" to challenge the party. The sickly Chen Yun was even more militant in a rare television appearance: "We must expose the plot hatched in secret by a very small number of people. We must struggle against them, and never yield to them."

As one Chinese veteran remarked, "Deng Xiaoping cannot possibly preside over the funeral of the Communist Party." However, the return of the octogenarian old guard is not a viable option for the party, or for China.

Brake on progress

Nor is the Communist Party a viable vehicle for China's future—at least that party as currently constituted. It represents an arbitrary autocracy of position and privileged stand-

ing against those forces that have long represented China's elite. This has earned it the hatred of not only students and the once-ruling mandarin families of China, but of the entire population. It has been the primary instrument of China's brutalization and suffering over the last 40 years.

Whatever "plot" Deng and Chen Yun are exclaiming about in their efforts to put down demands for freedom, there are various factions in the party that are aware of the party's profound limitations in its ability to lead China toward the 21st century. In 1987, for example, Zhao Ziyang took steps to curtail the party's power in the functioning of the society. First, a civil service examination was introduced for entry into the government, and second, he fought to replace political party commissars as the bosses of factories, with professional management. The latter was a point of bitter factional dispute.

Without merit (probably half the party cadre are illiterate), the party for the most part has entrenched itself in power in the cities and countryside through the use of its privileges and perquisites and the use of the power of corruption and bribery exacted against the average Chinese citizen. To make its presence even more bitter, the party is the enforcement vehicle for the one-child-per-family policy, a policy that goes against the grain of millennia of Chinese culture.

At root, the party has failed miserably, and the "mandate of heaven" has been withdrawn.

This is the background for the explosion in China over the last six weeks, and the reason why—no matter what the intentions of any group of reformers—the student protest effort was bound to veer out of the control of any one faction or leader.

In contrast to the party bureaucrats, the forces that brought forth the new revolution in China represent the intelligentsia of China, backed by the families. Its mode of organization is similar to that of the Sun Yat-sen revolution nearly 80 years ago: a massive intervention of overseas Chinese into the China mainland in an effort to bring the country out of its backwardness and oppression.

The role of the students in catalyzing this process is not new in China, and extends many centuries before the May 4, 1919, Movement whose rallying cry was "Science and Freedom." As in other Asian countries, the students are viewed by the society at large as the "conscience of the nation" and therefore cannot be ignored. The Maoists used the students themselves in the Cultural Revolution; the students in Tiananmen Square today represent the exact ideological opposite of Mao's duped Red Guards. Many of the Red Guards of the 1960s represent the embittered parents of the students marching today.

Along with the students, marched the workers—not only in Beijing, but in cities across the country, and reportedly the China All-Union Federation donated heavily to the student cause.

This extreme challenge to the foundations of the govern-

ment are also made possible by the deep fissures within the ruling structures. How deeply the party is divided can be seen by the declaration of Chou En-lai's venerable widow (the adoptive mother of Li Peng) that no violence must be used against the students.

In addition, the military is also evidently deeply split. Although Deng Xiaoping reportedly managed to gain the personal loyalty of the regional military commanders, senior military leaders, including the former defense minister, publicly went on record opposing any crackdown on the students. According to Chinese press in Bangkok, two marshals and seven senior generals personally phoned Deng Xiaoping demanding that he not squash the Beijing rebellion. In addition, 2,000 military officers of the general staff, the logistics staff, and the political affairs staff of the Armed Forces signed a petition calling for the resignation of Deng and Li Peng.

On the other side, the "political committees" of the respective Armed Forces have publicly come out for Li Peng.

These facts indicate that even if Deng and company are successful in quelling the movement for now, that movement will re-emerge. As one Chinese source indicated: "Imagine what will happen when Deng Xiaoping dies." For China and for humanity as a whole, the revolution that began in Tiananmen Square must go forward, if China is not to be plunged into a catastrophic dark age.

Stability seekers

That, however, is not the view from Washington and Moscow. The Soviets have been openly rooting for Li Peng to put down the students with any means necessary, and the Soviet Politburo again reiterated its dedication to totalitarian rule by voting to continue a ban on all demonstrations.

But the prize for the most fatuous statements uttered by any public personality—an award given by a vote of the students at Tiananmen Square, according to European press—was given to George Bush. Declining to give his support to the students, Bush declared: "I'm old enough to remember Hungary in 1956, and I don't want to be a catalyst for encouraging a course of action that would inevitably lead to violence and bloodshed." Bush declared that there was nothing the West could do to help the demonstrators. The State Department was more blunt. The *International Herald Tribune* May 23 quoted a State Department official as saying: "The government in trouble in China is a friendly government with which we have had good relations. We don't wish that government ill." According to the article, "U.S. officials also expressed a certain sympathy for Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese officials who worked closely with the United States to improve relations."

With these words, Washington continues to believe in the Soviet-China-Washington condominium that was washed out by the events in China over the last weeks. No matter what unfolds in Beijing, those events have created a new geometry for world affairs.