

Will the Communist Party take China down with it?

by Mary M. Burdman

The world's biggest secret society, the Chinese Communist Party, is holding its 14th Party Congress the week of Oct. 12 in Beijing. There is one issue dominating the proceedings, which is how the party, led by the "Gang of Ancients," the octogenarian survivors of the 1949 Maoist revolution, is going to keep its stranglehold control over the 1.2 billion people of China.

The "reform" faction led by 88-year-old Deng Xiaoping thinks this can only be done by allowing a small percentage access to more food and consumer goods; the "hardline" faction of 87-year-old Chen Yun fears that Deng's loosening of state control will bring the whole edifice down. For historical reasons, with implications far broader than the dictatorial ambitions of either, Chen Yun is probably right.

The power struggle between these two factions broke out into the open in January of this year, when Deng Xiaoping, officially retired from all party and government positions, suddenly emerged to make a trip south to the "Special Economic Zone" of Shenzhen, next to Hong Kong, and later visited the Zhuhai SEZ near Macao and Shanghai. Deng's method of intervening in China's national politics was not unique; Mao Zedong launched the 10-year holocaust of the Cultural Revolution by going to his radical power base in Shanghai to outflank his party opponents in Beijing.

Can Dengism survive Deng?

Although Deng's "reform and opening up" forces appear to have taken over for the moment, it is well to remember the last Party Congress in 1987. At that time, then-Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang, Deng's protégé, spoke of opening up and political reform; two years later, Deng ordered troops to slaughter China's students protesting the corruption of the brutal party aristocracy in Tiananmen Square. While "Dengism" may prevail for the moment, the real issue is if Dengism can survive Deng.

Although the old revolutionaries have not hesitated to shower privilege and position on their families, official political heirs tend to meet bad ends. Current Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, who replaced the ousted Zhao in 1989, has already been denounced by Deng as an inadequate leader; Deng's earlier heir apparent, Hu Yaobang, was ousted in disgrace before his death in 1989.

Prime Minister Li Peng is too well known as the enforcer of the Tiananmen Square massacre to survive long without Deng's patronage. Deng has no successor.

Meanwhile, the Gang of Ancients is aging fast. Only six remain: Deng, Chen Yun, Yang Shangkun, 86, Bo Yibo, 85, Peng Zhen, 90, and Wang Zhen, 85. Already this year the relative youngster Li Xiannain died at 83, along with the last of the revolutionary marshals, Nie Rongzhen; Deng Yingchao, the widow of China's long-term Premier Zhou Enlai; and one of the biggest liars of the Communist Party regime, 81-year-old re-writer of history Hu Qiaomu.

The comment of one observer, the *New York Times's* Nicholas Kristoff, on the Congress was that "it looked like a nursing home behind the podium; but that is traditional for a Chinese Party Congress." The youngest delegate, an Olympic swimming gold-medal winner, wrote energetically during Jiang Zemin's two-hour speech, but most of the delegates, far older, were not able to match his level of activity, Kristoff noted.

They sat there reading the speech—which they had all already read—along with Jiang; when it came near to a point where they must applaud, their brows all furrowed together with the effort to get the timing right, but all seemed to succeed in applauding on cue.

The Ancients suffered a setback: Three Congress delegates were so old, they died after being elected, so that instead of having 1,992 official delegates to match the year, the Congress has, curiously enough, 1,989—a number not likely to please Deng Xiaoping: To prevent further such unfortunate events, three ambulances and a fire truck are parked outside the hall, fully equipped with oxygen tanks and cardiac defibrillators in case of heart attacks.

China on the brink

Where does this leave China? On the edge of the abyss, wrote journalist Zhang Weiguo of Shanghai, now under house arrest there, in an article published in the Paris daily *Libération* Oct. 13. Political reform is essential now if China is not to lose perhaps its last chance to avoid total social chaos and breakdown, Zhang wrote. While the former U.S.S.R. has lost its central government and been dismembered, those who visit the Community of Independent States agree that

civil society remains intact there, because the changes in the U.S.S.R. did not destroy the social order. This happened because of the raising of the civil consciousness of the population, and the ongoing strengthening of social institutions and the (relative) freedom of the press. Would this be true of China?

No, say those few who dare to speak in private about the future. In China, the collapse of the government and division of the nation would plunge the nation into chaos; society would collapse at the same time as the state. In Zhang's view, this is because, since 1949, the successive campaigns against China's intellectuals have snapped the chain of traditional culture, and 10 years of Cultural Revolution systematically perverted moral values. Chinese society rests entirely under the Communist Party and the traditional Chinese family; all independent social institutions are lacking.

Those who are informed think that Mao Zedong held the entire nation hostage in order to impose his personal dictatorship. His words, "Without the Communist Party, there would be no new China," means actually, "without the direction of the Communist Party, the body of Chinese society will disappear." It is thus that the population is inhibited from their search for political reform, and gives the CP the "legitimacy" of its power.

If events similar to those in the Soviet Union in 1991 were to unexpectedly happen in China tomorrow, according to Zhang, the country would lack the civil and religious resources and social institutions to deal with them. Today, one can say that the CIS nations, if they can survive the throes of conversion to a market economy, see the light at the end of the tunnel. Not so China.

The CP refuses to accelerate political reform for basic liberties and creation of social institutions, which could provide the nation's intellectual elite with a podium from which to reestablish the national direction and moral values; it once again is risking that a golden opportunity will have been lost.

The opportunities for political reform are becoming more and more rare, and briefer and briefer. History will not give China another 5,000 years. There is no time to wait, Zhang concluded.

'Free market' chaos

It is to this life-and-death crisis, that Deng Xiaoping proposes Thatcherite "free market" lunacy as a solution, the same lunacy that is now destroying Great Britain. Although China's free marketeers, fearful of social unrest in a nation of 1.2 billion people, are extremely cautious—there has been no overnight imposition of "shock therapy" as was done in Poland, in Deng's China—continuation of the current "reforms" will spell disaster.

Deng's free market means, in short, opening up coastal "concessions" to build cheap-labor, cheap-export light industries, in a nation whose infrastructure is so primitive that it wastes a full 30% of its annual grain crop due to lack of

storage, transport, and distribution capabilities. Even the Dengists are getting worried that the economy is "overheating"—which means choking on its inefficiency and lack of infrastructure and raw materials.

While China's industrial output value is rising in the range of 20%, what this really amounts to is tons of shoddy, unsaleable junk piling up in warehouses.

Yet, Jiang Zemin proclaimed at the Party Congress Oct. 12: "Practice in China has proved that where market forces have been given full play there the economy has been vigorous and has developed in a sound way. We must continue to intensify the market forces." But while Jiang called for a "socialist market economy," his statements on political control made clear why he emphasized the "socialist."

The party must reign supreme. "It would be absolutely wrong and harmful for anyone to doubt, weaken or negate the party's position in power and its leading role," Jiang said. "Without political and social stability, any attempt to carry out reform . . . and to promote economic development would be out of the question. . . . We must adhere to the Four Cardinal Principles [of Chinese communism] and resolutely eliminate all factors that might lead to unrest or turmoil."

In September, the CP Politburo distributed its "Document Number Seven" to provincial and military leaders. The plan demands much-heightened security in China's cities, to prevent any demonstrations or even any gatherings by university students, and to ensure that discontent among workers is held in check.

It is an irony, that Document Seven demands that the authorities focus on the Special Economic Zones, which Deng so proudly patronizes, as places where there is a "chaotic security situation," which must be attended to this year and next.

Security problems

There have been many reports from China in the past months of industrial workers striking, occupying their factories, assaulting and even killing their bosses, and staging violent protests as "reforms" of the run-down state heavy industries threaten them with unemployment and homelessness. In China, housing, health care, and adequate food all depend on having a workplace; kicking redundant workers out of their jobs means they lose all.

Document Seven states that China must "prevent security problems from turning into political events." Security must be strengthened in factories, mines, and oil fields, the document states, and riot squads, fast-response units, and new command centers for security forces must be set up in all large and medium-sized cities. "The legal authorities must strongly support enterprises as they deepen their reforms and change the structure of their management. . . . [We must] be alert to the appearance of factors that could lead to instability and prevent people with ulterior motives from stirring up workers to riot," the document said.