

What hangs on Zhao Ziyang's fate

by Linda de Hoyos

Zhao Ziyang, who was ousted as general secretary of the Communist Party when martial law was imposed on Beijing in May, is unlikely to come to trial for his alleged role in the "counterrevolutionary rebellion." This is the latest word from the Chinese mainland through Hong Kong, in the words of Vice Minister of Culture Ying Ruocheng. According to the *South China Morning Post* Sept. 13, although Ying is a mid-ranking cadre, "he would not have spoken out on such a sensitive topic unless authorized by the highest quarters."

Zhao Ziyang's fate is one barometer of the power battle raging in the People's Republic of China. Throughout August, he was the target of diatribes coming from those who zealously carried out the Beijing massacre of June 4. As the *Hong Kong Standard* reported Aug. 23, "Hardline leaders including [President] Yang Shangkun, [Prime Minister] Li Peng; and [Politburo member] Yao Yilin strongly favored imposing harsh punishment on Zhao and proposed laying 'anti-party' charges against him." And in mid-August, Yuan Mu, a member of the State Council who acted as Beijing's first official spokesman in the hours following the Tiananmen massacre, declared that "Should Comrade Zhao Ziyang be found to have participated in the recent insurgency or plotted or instigated the movement behind the scenes, he should be charged criminally."

According to the Hong Kong daily *Cheng Ming* Aug. 1, the Communist Party had composed a special group composed of Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, and intelligence services chief Qiao Shi to examine Zhao Ziyang's crimes. Since June, numbers of people known to be associates of Zhao Ziyang have either fled the country or been arrested. Bao Tong, Zhao's former secretary and key aide as head of the Central Committee's Research Office for Political Reform, was arrested even before the June 3 massacre, soon after Zhao himself was placed under virtual house arrest. Zhao Ziyang's eldest son was reportedly arrested in the northern port of Dalian in early August, as he was trying to flee the country. Other associates managed to escape, such as Yang Jiaqi, and Chen Yizi, director of the Institute of Restructuring the Economy.

Other Zhao Ziyang associates have been summarily replaced. The president of the Beijing University was forced out and replaced by the vice president Wu Shuqing, known to be close to Zhao's arch-rival Li Peng. Another is governor

of Hainan Province Liang Xiang, who was summoned to Beijing in July never to return. His official removal was announced in September. His replacement is an old cohort of Li Peng's from the Energy Ministry. Since Hainan was a key target for Zhao's free-enterprise zone policy, his replacement by a Li Peng stalwart could be a signal discouraging investment from Japan and the U.S., both of which had been invited into the strategic island province.

According to Hong Kong reports, Zhao Ziyang remains adamant on his opposition to martial law, and refused to "self-criticize" at an expanded Politburo meeting June 18. Yang Shangkun, whose son-in-law led the attack on the Beijing students, has declared that since Zhao Ziyang is responsible for creating the democracy movement, he bears responsibility for the casualties, a crime that could be punishable by death. The public attacks against Zhao are epitomized by the diatribe published in the People's daily Aug. 7, by new Beijing University president Wu Shuqing. Wu charged that Zhao's policy of "opening up" is a "road that will lead China to extinction. This is because if China does not take the socialist road, then it can only be a vassal to Western countries, and in the end, will fall under the control of the monopolist forces of international capitalism."

Wu, like others in the Zhao hanging party, charged that Zhao had opposed the "four cardinal principles" establishing the primacy of the Communist Party over all aspects of life. (Deng had asserted the "four cardinal principles" in the repressive aftermath of the "Beijing Spring" of 1976-78.) The charge is tantamount to a charge of treason.

Why then hasn't Beijing taken decisive action against Zhao? First, within the P.R.C.'s factional tradition, the forced death of an opponent—as in the case of Lin Biao—is used only as a last resort signifying a final mandate that the victim and his policies are never to be revived. If the Beijing leadership takes such action against Zhao, it would signal to the world that the P.R.C. has retreated back to Maoist xenophobia and cannibalistic austerity against its own population.

The Chinese leadership may not be able to afford the internal risk of putting Zhao on trial. Will China's millions swallow another Cultural Revolution? Both Deng Xiaoping and his alleged arch-rival Chen Yun, the godfather of Zhao's opponent Li Peng, are arguing for such factional matters to be shelved for a couple of years: The party's unity and power is too tenuous to afford a public factional brawl. Zhao's colleague Chen Yizi reports that "70% of those at ministerial level and 80% of senior officials supported the students before martial law."

The apparent unwillingness of the Chinese leadership to pillory Zhao calls into question the Beijing clique's depth of control. As Chen Yizi stated upon his arrival in Paris: The United States would be making a "bad investment" if it returned to business as usual with the current regime (including Deng). "The government's position is very difficult. It will have a hard time surviving for two or three years."