

Hu Yaobang Ousted

Party Shakeup Underway in China

By James Irons

The ouster of General Secretary Hu Yaobang January 16 indicates that the conflicting pulls which are built into Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic strategy to modernize China have made their presence felt right in the very center of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

For the last six weeks, those pulls have been publicly displayed in the streets of China's major cities, as Chinese students have confronted CPC authority demanding (with varying degrees of self-consciousness) Western-style bourgeois democracy to go along with Deng's borrow-from-the-West economic reforms. After a period of hesitation, the CPC cracked down on the protests in early January and labeled them an attempt to "impose all-out Westernization" on China. Hu's dismissal ten days later, along with widely publicized expulsions from the CPC of pro-liberalization intellectuals, was an explicit admission that the problem went far deeper than backward ideas among a certain layer of students. Rather, the top party leader and a host of influential party members were held responsible for vacillation in the defense of—or outright opposition to—Chinese socialism.

The ensuing shift in the CPC's posture is significant, with a broad party purge apparently gathering steam and Deng himself now proclaiming the need to aggressively combat "bourgeois liberalization." But the contradiction at the root of the recent turmoil has not been addressed: no CPC leader has yet questioned the fundamental approach of trying to build socialism in China with such heavy reliance on capitalist economic methods, in tacit alliance with imperialism and opposition to the rest of the

socialist camp.

Undoubtedly the immediate catalyst for Hu's ouster was his indecisive response to the student protests of December and early January. But underneath, Hu's toleration—and perhaps encourage-



Hu Yaobang, ousted Chinese party general secretary.

ment—of such open dissent was only the most recent in a series of approaches that made him suspect among many in the CPC. Hu was one of the prime architects behind last spring's liberalization drive among China's intellectuals, a campaign that was seen as paving the way for political reform to accompany Deng's economic programs. In actuality, the hoped-for liberal atmosphere quickly spilled over into thinly veiled political opposition to both the government and

party. Such leading lights of the intellectual movement as Fang Lizhi, the former university vice president who was recently expelled from the party, used the call for free expression to proclaim the outdatedness of Marxism-Leninism.

Such openly backward tendencies quickly collided with a section of the CPC which had been gearing up for a fight for some time. For the first time in the post-Mao era, ideological questions dominated a CPC central committee meeting held last September. And when the fascination with bourgeois democracy spread so visibly to the student population late last year, these CPC members were ready to go on the offensive. "Some people take letting 100 schools contend as meaning that Marxism is one school contending," wrote a party theoretician, Jia Lin. "This denies Marxism as the basic theoretical basis for guiding our thought. Marxism isn't just one school in contention. . . . It is the school with the function of guiding."

DENG AND ZHAO

Hu was a protégé of the real power in the CPC, Deng Xiaoping, and was at one time considered his hand-picked successor. It is not clear, however, whether Deng agreed to Hu's ouster only or mainly because of pressure from more "hardline" sectors of the CPC or whether Deng himself may have been less than happy with Hu's record. It had become increasingly obvious that Hu had been unable to galvanize the necessary ideological and political support for Deng's push toward modernization, and he apparently also lacked the enthusiastic backing of the military. While Hu retains his seat on the Politburo and the five-person Standing Committee, it is unlikely that he will have these posts come the next CPC Congress

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in October.

Hu's successor is Zhao Ziyang, another longtime protégé of Deng Xiaoping. The choice of Zhao indicates both that Deng is still in control and that his fundamental program for modernizing China will continue. In a meeting with Robert Mugabe, the visiting prime minister of Zimbabwe, Deng asserted that, "If there are any shortcomings in implementing our open policy, the main one is that China needs further opening."

CHINESE SOCIALISM

The reassertion of party authority and the importance of Marxism-Leninism in the CPC is encouraging and must also be seen in light of other positive, if more gradual, shifts. Over the last few years Beijing has slowly upgraded its economic

ties with other socialist countries as well as renewed its party-to-party relations with a number of Eastern European Communist Parties. On the theoretical front, the CPC has quietly repudiated many of Maoism's most backward theoretical propositions, including the notorious thesis that capitalism had been restored in the Soviet Union. (See *Frontline* Nov. 10 and 24, 1986.) Taken as a whole, these developments suggest that the CPC, or at least one section of it, is attempting to counter capitalist tendencies and the pull of the West.

But the problems that still confront China are enormous, and the present leadership change only highlights the serious contradictions that continue to plague the country almost forty years into its socialist project.

The root cause of these problems remains the narrow nationalist outlook that sees China's economic development un-

folding outside the framework of the existing system of world socialism and in collaboration with U.S. imperialism. In his effort to modernize China through whatever policies offer the fastest results, Deng has opted to build socialism with a heavy dose of capitalist methods, trying to walk a thin red line between East and West and between plan and market, rather than locate China firmly in the anti-imperialist front. In the short run, China has been able to use various capitalist measures to register gains for its economy, and no particular reform in and of itself is necessarily a negative concession to the West. But in the long run, Deng's path is wrought with many contradictions, economic, political and social. Heightened opposition to bourgeois liberalism today is a plus, but all indications are that China's road to firmly consolidate its socialist foundations will still be a long march. □