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 vacillating 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 tolerance—and perhaps encourage-

Hu Yaobang, ousted Chinese party general secretary.

party. Such leading lights of the intellectual movement as Feng 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 protege 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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to adopt an IMF standby agreement. At the same time, he has eased up on repression of the opposition and made motions towards cracking down on corruption. To accentuate his new image, Balaguer invited Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to attend his second inauguration. (The huge popular reception accorded the Nicaraguan leader at the ceremonies may have provoked some second thoughts in Balaguer’s entourage as to whether the Dominican president may have overdone his image-building efforts.)

ECONOMIC CRISIS

How long Balaguer will be able to pull off this political juggling act is an open question. The DR faces a chronic economic crisis that has already lasted for almost half a decade with no end in sight. U.S. trade policies have effectively made it impossible for the country to pay off its $4.6 billion debt without resorting to massive austerity measures. Since 1983, for example, the U.S. has cut the Dominican sugar quota by 45%, and yet another cut may be forthcoming. Sugar is the DR’s main export. Washington’s protectionist trade policies have made the Caribbean Basin Initiative—launched by the Reagan administration over four years ago to bring free market medicine to the region’s ills—a dead letter. According to Newsweek (Dec. 1, 1986), “marketplace magic has yet to reach the Caribbean Basin.”

As a direct result of the debt crisis, the Dominican peso has steadily lost ground to the dollar. With a weakened currency, Dominicans have had to import less, and less capital is available internally. An extremely high unemployment rate has spurred a growing wave of Dominican emigration to the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

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While failing to move forward with land distribution to small farmers as mandated by the agrarian reform law, the government is selling off parcels of land from state-owned farms. The Dominican Technological Institute, now under the Central Bank, is to come under a private university. And a private company was recently given the concession to sell seeds produced by a state-owned enterprise.

In other moves, the government has passed on the cost of the crisis to the masses by lifting price restrictions on some basic food items. The Central Bank is considering a U.S. proposal to “sell” a

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Hu’s successor is Zhao Ziyang, another longtime protege 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-