

Deng Xiaoping's Dilemma

By Doug Ward

Recent events in China highlight the difficulty—nay, the impossibility—of any attempt to build socialism on the basis of an anti-socialist line.

Throughout the last year, the Deng Xiaoping faction, which controls the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese government, has been busily engaged in trying to promote—and expand—their severely reduced Four Modernizations Program: modernization of the military, agriculture, industry and science. The greatest activity took place during 1983 and early 1984 in agriculture and industry.

In agriculture, the Deng faction was moving heaven and earth to disestablish the Commune Production Brigades and establish the "responsibility system." Under the "responsibility system," individual peasant families, members of the Production Brigade, were given considerable additional land for their private use. Produce grown on these expanded private plots could be sold on the open market by the peasant, after delivering a modest portion to the state. Thus, the individual peasant would gradually acquire a greater interest in his private plot and private profit than in the co-operative or collective or state farm work and profit. This would establish a form of primitive capitalism in the Chinese countryside.

INDUSTRY

In industry, the Deng faction was seeking to put the many millions of unemployed "back to work" in what they called "labor-taking-up business." Individually, or in private-profit groups of two or more, the unemployed would perform various "services" for which some need existed: pulling rubber-tired rickshaws; selling gadgets or quick snacks on the streets; doing laundry; doing chores, etc. Thus, they would become self-supporting private enterprisers—deprived of any government social benefits. Here, too, a primitive capitalism would be established.

When accused by opponents within China of trying to establish primitive capitalism, the Deng faction replied that this would be impossible because "the basic elements of the economy" would "remain socially-owned." They carefully refrained from admitting that day by day they were chipping away at the foundations of social ownership, and that to the extent their program succeeded, social ownership in agriculture and industry would be reduced by that much—and weakened by that much.

Of course, perhaps some did not know the consequences of the policies they were

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Jackson . . .

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tween a real cultural united front and a multiracial buy-in, a consumer sound fury signifying nothing. But such a step would require making the existence of a progressive viewpoint conscious and polarizing it against the racist, sexist, exploitative and bourgeois tendencies that still overwhelmingly dominate popular culture as a whole. And Michael Jackson is not about to set his tremendous energy in that direction.

Because of this, the positive developments crystallized in Jackson's phenomenal popularity and personal artistry

supporting—but, objectively, the results of a policy do not depend on everyone who helped make it succeed knowing what he or she is doing. Some certainly know, however. Those who designed and are promoting the program hardest are well aware of the final objective results if their program is allowed to succeed. But to Deng, who once said that "It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, so long as he catches mice," it doesn't matter whether a system is socialist or capitalist, so long as it produces "results."

WHAT RESULTS?

Deng's dilemma, of course, is that his pragmatic approach is not producing the "results" desired. Last July, the Deng faction admitted that "disorderly price increases, disorderly allocations of materials and produce, and crooked behavior" were spreading all over the country. The "labor-taking-up business" effort wasn't working very well either, and party General Secretary Hu Yaobang announced that "500,000 youth from the Provinces" would go to the distant border-lands, "to expand the fresh forces" there.

A bit later, in October, a table showing "Chinese-Foreign Joint Ventures" was published. It revealed a startlingly low number of such projects started since 1978 and an equally startlingly low average value of investment by the foreigners.

Politically, too, there were obstacles. Almost as soon as the "responsibility system" was launched, some Production Brigades began trying to prevent or to overthrow the expanded private plots scheme. Reports came in of the sabotage of "special enterprise zone" production facilities in the countryside, a "factory at Young Willow," etc. And within the CPC, members of factions opposing Deng's were busy trying to defeat some aspects of the Four Modernizations and restrict others.

Deng's response to these problems? Exhort the Chinese masses to work harder! Push ahead with reliance on capitalist schemes, capitalist forces and foreign investment! Purge opposition from the party and the society!

Deng's ringing call was "For the glory of the fatherland, to increase the wealth of the people, everybody make new contributions . . ." But to whom would the fruits of these contributions go? In April, bogged down in economic disarray, the Deng faction negotiated a loan from the World Bank for the construction of a port. In June, the State Council—the Chinese equivalent of the U.S. Cabinet—called on the entire country to make more use of foreign capital.

A month later, the cry went out: "Make use of foreign capital to develop agriculture." In August, Deng and company arranged another loan from Japan to build two railroads and a port and Premier Zhao Ziyang met with David Rockefeller and a group of U.S. oil barons. This

remain promising but insubstantial. They are limited to certain changed objective conditions (the character of the new audience and increased opportunities for minority musicians) and certain narrowly cultural developments (the interplay of musical styles, multiracial imagery in music videos, and so on). Truckloads of Grammy awards won't substitute for the ideological outlook essential to making any of this stick.

Short of the emergence of more conscious forces within this musical trend really intent on starting something, it won't take much for the music industry to take this new development in capitalist-culture-as-usual and just beat it. □

interesting duo announced that together they will form co-operative ventures to develop China's "natural resources." At about the same time, the Deng faction publicly asserted once more the claim that "The South Sands Archipelago"—oil-bearing islands claimed by Vietnam, Taiwan and others—"are ours."

Meanwhile, Chinese capitalists, both former and present, were appointed to seats in the National People's Congress, the National Federation of Women, the Young Communist League and elsewhere.

THE PURGE

These capitalists were also invited to assist in Deng's major political project: purging the communist party of his opponents under the banner of "exterminating the spreading evil of leftism."

This campaign had already been underway for a year when the central committee met in September 1983 and announced its intention to remove three million members from the party. Organizational measures were necessary because "ideological work," the "punishment for incorrect party behavior," was failing. Wiser, more prudent—and less desperate—leaders might have concluded that the combination of economic problems and political opposition called for more realistic policies and programs. But wisdom and prudence are not characteristics for which the Deng faction is noted, and it was desperate.

So the CPC, and the country overall, were launched into a more intense phase of the already ongoing struggle. And besides the steps toward removing members of the party, executions began to mount; a few days after the central committee session, the execution of 82 "criminals" was announced.

Of course, not all the "criminals" executed, not all the "corrupt elements" punished, were "leftists." Lumped together in this category were all opponents of Deng's program: there were remnant supporters of the Cultural Revolution to be sure, but there were also other political factions, as well as many real smugglers, black marketeers, price gougers and other thieves. And there were even some foreign Chinese businessmen and their hangers-on, the people so dearly beloved by Deng Xiaoping.

The main slogans of the campaign, besides the obligatory attacks on "leftism," were "Read the Books!" and "Raise High the Flag of Patriotism!"

The main book CPC members and the masses were supposed to read, not surprisingly, was the "Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping"—published only a short time before the purge was announced. As you may have guessed, the book extolled the great virtues of the Four Modernizations Program à la Deng.

And the central committee intended to try to make the Flag of Patriotism serve as a rallying-point for a much greater number

of supporters than, in present-day China, could be gathered by any other means.

CAMPAIGN OVER?

But, despite the help of many persons outside the party, and especially Chinese capitalists, Deng's purge did not succeed. The combined forces in opposition to it, and the inability of Deng to successfully rally even those who supported his program, ground it, at least temporarily, to a halt. At the same time, the conditions which forced the Deng faction to attempt a purge still existed. And Deng, the man who doesn't care if a cat is black or white, hasn't changed his political colors either. So if there be any among my readers naive enough to believe that the latest halt really brought an end to Deng's program to purge the party of his opponents, let me assure you: 'tain't so. The Deng forces regard this as a period of recuperation, during which they will poke and prod wherever they can and hope for the day when they can again mount a full-scale offensive.

"We will take the initiative to investigate and punish all organized internal illegal disorderly activity," the *People's Daily* declared on January 24, 1984.

And they regard as "illegal disorderly activity" any demonstrations by opponents, including the millions of unemployed; any opposition to Deng's Four Modernizations program; any opposition to the continued creation of primitive capitalism in agriculture or to the creeping industrial capitalism spreading out from the Five Special Zones across the rest of China; or to the "special relationship" of China to U.S. imperialism in foreign policy, or to China's own primitive imperialism with respect to Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos and the Mongolian People's Republic.

So long as Deng remains able to mount them, the campaigns to purge the Party will never end.

And while all this goes on, the Chinese masses face harder times ahead. The Deng faction proclaims that "the employment system has begun to change and is breaking the iron-ricebowl practices and mentality." Yet it is precisely these things that had guaranteed a portion of the Chinese working class employment and income!

Are Chinese leaders aware of the problem? On February 12, Vice-Premier Wan Li, who is reputed to not always agree with Deng on the Four Modernizations, told an audience of students at Shanghai Exchange College: "If we don't reform, we will have no way out [of our dilemma]."

But toward the end of February, it didn't appear that the Deng faction was making any great effort at reform. They were still propagating the same slogans, the same policies, as at the beginning of 1983. And China continues to march down a troubled road. □

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