

Party slams its door on Jiang's plan*

By Xu Yufang

BEIJING - With no fuss and without a word in public at all, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CPC) has repudiated the bold plan of its leader, General Secretary Jiang Zemin, to open the party to capitalists and entrepreneurs.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the US, it seems no one bothered to check on the fate of Jiang's plan, which he first made public in an historic announcement on July 1. The proposal met its end, in fact, in the CPC Central Committee plenary session of September 24-26, according to informed sources.

That the Central Committee at the same time did endorse Jiang's theory of the Three Representatives appears to have confused observers, who have been misled into believing that the theory means nothing less than opening the party to capitalists.

Jiang's imaginative idea of granting party membership to people who at present are not eligible - the bourgeois, and entrepreneurs in particular - was dead even before the Central Committee met. A consensus was reached at a *Minzhu Shenghuohui* ("democratic life meeting", a sort of informal tea gathering) in early September, attended by most members of the Politburo and three high-brow senior elders, Qiao Shi, Song Ping and Liu Huaqing. During the meeting, Jiang was targeted for making his bold announcement before going through the normal channels of formulating major party policies. Subsequently, the central secretariat, headed by Jiang's heir-apparent Hu Jintao, decided to drop the open-door proposal from the business of the Central Committee plenary session.

To save face for Jiang, it was agreed not to make an issue of his proposal, not even to debate its pros and cons. Leftist hardliners such as Deng Liqun agreed to this. The plenary session thus simply ignored the proposal. It flopped, ipso facto, in the time-honored Chinese way of defeating a major policy change. Instead, the plenary session carried a resolution calling upon the whole party to pay attention to the conduct of cadres, lest the party should come to be detested by the general population.

Jiang's plan might still have had a chance at the plenary session if he had been able to muster a simple majority of votes in its favor. He failed to do that, and the Central Committee's resolution omitted any mention of the proposal, which meant another nail in its coffin.

However, the biggest blow to Jiang is perhaps not the rejection of his plan, but the criticism aimed at him by his senior comrades for trying to institute dictatorship.

In the "democratic life" meeting, Ding Guangen, the CPC propaganda chief and Jiang's major protege, received the most rebukes for having tried to suppress discussion on the plan's merits while the party had yet to make a decision. Prior to the meeting, Ding had gone all out to instruct editors of all media to suppress anything that did not conform to Jiang's July 1 proclamation. Ding was reported to have said that there was no longer any room for discussion since the head of the party had made a statement. In criticizing Ding for having confused a leading cadre with the collective leadership, the party elders were in fact reminding Jiang that he should submit himself to the collective will of his peers.

Hu Jintao, Jiang's vice president, was also censured. His misdeed was having said in early September that Jiang's open-door proposal was the result of

collective wisdom. Not true, said the elders, as no collective decision had been reached. Hu tendered his self-criticism, which was immediately accepted. Jiang himself was not directly criticized. He was even given credit for having come up with an innovative idea, albeit a somewhat impractical one. But the heavy rebuke for Ding sent a loud and clear message that Jiang's attempt to create history had failed. Had he succeeded, his innovation would have been sufficient to rank him on a par with Mao Zedong, who founded the People's Republic, and Deng Xiaoping, whose economic reforms led the country out of poverty. Now he will be remembered merely as one of the party's general secretaries.

All this has been obscured by the fact that the Central Committee plenary session did indeed uphold Jiang's theory of the Three Representatives. But this was not the first time the theory had been endorsed, and its inclusion in the committee's resolution amounts to little more than a reiteration of the theory and not an endorsement of Jiang's July 1 speech.

The Three Representatives theory is perhaps the most misunderstood part of contemporary Chinese politics. As a major success of the propaganda machine of the CPC, the world has been led to believe that it was a calculated move by the mainstream of the party to change the party's color. The reality is entirely different.

It all began as an attempt to tackle growing chaos, and the theory's originators did not foresee that it would spawn further chaos.

The term "Three Representatives" was first uttered on February 25, 2000, by Jiang in a brief address - any speech of less than an hour is brief in China. "Summarizing the more than 70 years' history of our party, an important conclusion can be reached, that is, our party won the support of the people because throughout the historical stages of revolution, construction and

reforms, our party has always represented [1] the development demands of China's advanced productivity, [2] the forward direction of China's advanced civilization, and [3] the fundamental interest of China's broadest populace," Jiang told a gathering of village and township cadres during a tour of Gaozhou, an underdeveloped part of economically vibrant Guangdong province.

"All CPC members and leading cadres have to deeply understand and firmly grip these 'three representatives', to instruct one's thoughts and deeds ... Today I bring up this issue and request everyone to study it together, in terms of theories and practices."

The invention of the Three Representatives was meant to patch up a situation that had got out of control. The purpose of Jiang's tour to Gaozhou was to inspect the implementation of his "Three Talks" campaign, at least according to newspaper headlines then. But during the tour, the party chief was exposed to how the "Three Talks" had gone awry.

The "Three Talks" - talk studying, talk politics, talk righteousness - were initiated by Jiang as a means to screen cadres of all levels, nationwide - effectively a party purge. Led by Organizational Works Department director Zeng Qinghong, the former director of Jiang's private office, the campaign began in 1999 with the emphasis on the "second talk" - politics, or factional line. At the start, the general populace was encouraged to scrutinize local cadres and make open to criticism. Inspectors from Zeng's office went to all corners of the country collecting those criticisms, and used them as reasons for promoting or demoting officials. However, it was commonly believed that this was only a pretext to cover the granting of partisan or factional favors.

Things soon ran out of control. Rural peasants, 90 percent of them yet to experience the benefits of economic reforms, burst out with their decade-old

grievances. What happened was described in some places as the return of the Cultural Revolution, with the populace indiscriminately bringing down cadres.

In relatively rich Guangdong, most of the wealth is concentrated in the Pearl River Delta, a triangular piece of estuary with the provincial capital, Guangzhou, and two former European colonies, Hong Kong and Macau, as the vertices. The rural areas in the west and the north of the province are not much better off than the backward west of China. In rural Gaozhou, Jiang heard in person the countless complaints of the ordinary peasants and felt the urgency of putting a stop to things. Against that background, he preached the "Three Representatives" gospel as a morale booster for local cadres, reassuring them of the CPC's support.

Immediately after the Gaozhou tour, the Three Talks campaign was drastically scaled down, confined only to city-level localities and *danwei* (work entities). At county-level and above, people were told to recite the Three Representatives, to remind themselves that the CPC as a whole was not subject to criticism.

The Three Representatives did not receive an immediate, official party welcome. When Jiang returned to Beijing, he encountered challenges by some members of the Politburo who said it was arrogant to claim that the CPC had always upheld the theory. After some amicable exchanges, the party set the official tone: to strive to achieve the Three Representatives. That was something of a deviation from Jiang's first speech on the topic, but it was the line stuck to by him in his second public pronouncement, made in his political base of Shanghai in the middle of May, 2000. The line has been pretty much intact ever since.

The Three Representatives theory became a substantial part of the resolution of the fifth plenary session of the CPC Central Committee in October last

year, and was subsequently reiterated at other meetings, including ones on discipline, economics and ideology.

Then, on July 1, Jiang made his keynote speech marking the 80th anniversary of the party, and expounded at length on the Three Representatives. Nothing new was found in those definitive paragraphs, but a bombshell was dropped in the following chapter, entitled "Strengthening and Improving the Construction of the Party According to the 'Three Representatives'." The party's chief steward proposed nothing less than broadening the base of the party by recruiting members from among the founders and technocrats of privately-owned information technology enterprises, management and technical employees of foreign-invested enterprises, the self-employed, proprietors of privately-owned enterprises, operatives of intermediary agencies, and freelance people.

All of a sudden, many observers found the phrase "CPC representing the fundamental interest of China's broadest populace" to imply that the CPC would no longer represent only the proletariat, but also an advanced section of the bourgeois. It was therefore said that the Three Representatives theory was calculated to open the door of the party to capitalist friends such as Henry Fok, the Macau casino tycoon. The multibillionaire Fok was indeed referred to as a qualified new entrant to the party during internal discussions.

In the months since Jiang's July 1 speech, the political scene in Beijing has been chaotic. Some revered ideologues, such as former propaganda chief, Deng Liqun, have voiced their opposition, while his successor, Ding Guangen, has insisted that the debate was closed.

In June 1989, the then patriarch Deng Xiaoping said, "Fortunately we, the old folks, are still alive," in referring to disgraced party general secretary Zhao Ziyang almost abdicating the dictatorship of the party in the face of students

demonstrating for democracy. The same words must have been repeated by retired elders who turned up at early-September's "democratic life" meeting and quashed Jiang's proposal to broaden party membership.

Now, the party position has returned to square one: no bourgeois allowed. The CPC will still strive to represent the broadest section of the populace, but not all the populace - at least not the capitalists.

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