

Comment

Deng's Long March to the 21st century

On a recent trip to Peking, I asked a senior official if China's leader Deng Xiaoping might one day be regarded on a par with Mao Tse Tung. "Deng," he prophesized, "will be called the greater revolutionary."

This past week in Peking saw the culmination of Deng's second Chinese revolution. Any sweeping change in the government that rules one person in five on earth merits our close attention.

Retired from China's ruling Politburo were 10 out of 24 members. Sixty-four of the 340-person party central committee were also ousted. These "retirements" are the climax of a two-year campaign in which Deng has purged millions of cadres from the party, bureaucracy and the military. Not since Stalin's purges of the 1930s has a communist party seen such a housecleaning.

Unlike Russia, where tens of millions were starved or executed, unlike Mao's China where Red Guards brought terror, the victims of Deng's purges have faced nothing worse than pensioned retirement and loss of perks. After years of patient effort, Deng and his followers appear to have finally broken the power of the remaining leftwing, Maoist factions among China's 20 million bureaucrats and 3.5 million-man armed forces.

While strong opponents of Deng's pragmatist policies still remain in the party and armed forces, three of his most implacable — and powerful — foes have just been removed.

Wang Dongxing, Mao's former bodyguard and a man with great influence in China's secret police and security forces, has been ousted. He remains an enigmatic figure who played an important but still mysteri-



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ous role in putting down the attempted coup and subsequent death of Marshall Lin Piao in 1971.

Also "retired" were two very powerful figures with important influence over the military, Marshalls Li Desheng and Nie Rongzhen.

Marshall Li was commander of Shenyang, one of China's key military districts; Marshall Nie was in charge of China's nuclear program. Both were old-guard Maoists who long opposed Deng's modernization and liberalization policies.

The removal of China's Defence Minister Zhang Aiping confirms that Deng now has a firm hold over the formerly recalcitrant Chinese military, a group deeply unhappy over the recent reduction of the People's Liberation Army by nearly one million men.

More important, changes at the Party Congress in Peking strongly suggest that when 81-year-old Deng Xiaoping retires or dies, China will adhere to the policies and programs of his reformist faction.

Deng has by now packed the party, the government, bureaucracy and the military with his like-minded supporters. Much of the older generation of communist cadres who fought with Mao through World War II and

the ensuing civil war are now safely out of the way.

All of this means that China will most likely continue its policy of rapid modernization in agriculture, industry, technology and education. Freer markets will be allowed to develop, more personal initiative and the profit motive will drive industry. Sterile orthodoxy in education is passe; new ideas are now sanctioned.

China will remain a totalitarian state where citizens are watched and controlled in even their most mundane activities. But Deng's reforms have meant that the party will present a more humane, caring face, that a few tentative freedoms may be allowed to bud — at least for the time being. Do not, however, expect a flowering of Western democracy.

Now that the xenophobic leftists have been crushed, China remains open to Western influence and will seek to absorb as much foreign technology as possible. The great nation of one billion will remain revolutionary, experimenting with all sorts of innovations in commerce, society and government. And, most significant, China will continue on its second Long March to becoming, in the early part of the 21st century, one of the world's major industrial powers.

All of this depends, of course, on the ability of the younger leaders, such as Hu Yaobang, Hu Qili, Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng, to continue Deng's popular and successful policies. With China, one can never be sure of anything: It is like watching the proverbial three men fighting under a blanket. One certainty: The world will have to pay a good deal more attention to the awakening giant of China — and recognize that Deng Xiaoping is one of the most remarkable men of the 20th century.