

China's Marxist assault on the internet¹

The new leadership in Beijing has shown the way it intends to go: Bo Xilai, Chongqing's discredited Party secretary (and former member of the CPC's Political Bureau) has been sentenced to life imprisonment.

The People's Daily, the Party's mouthpiece speaks of 'a persistent, high voltage campaign' against corruption to correct the Party's style and win people's support.

Xinhua says that probity is "the chief principle in self-discipline while law is a precondition for governing a country. ...It is the common wish of all Party members and citizens".

It is at least the will of General Secretary Xi Jinping, as the entire episode of the mediatized case and Sunday's judgment was minutely orchestrated by the Party.

The Chinese news agency asserts: "Sentencing Bo Xilai in accordance with law fully reflects that nobody is exempt from Party discipline and national law, and whoever is involved must be thoroughly investigated and severely punished in accordance with law."

Had not Xi Jinping announced that 'flies and the tigers' would be punished 'if found guilty'. Bo is the biggest tiger caught so far; others such Zhou Yongkang, the former Security czar may follow soon.

Xinhua admits that corruption is still rampant, "and the soil nurturing it still exists" and therefore a 'high voltage' crackdown is necessary.

Sinocism, an excellent daily e-newsletter on China, comments: "Bo will likely appeal but the sentence is very unlikely to change. Nor he is ever likely to

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make a comeback, pundit speculation notwithstanding. Barring a (very unlikely) neo-Maoist uprising that springs Bo from Qingcheng Prison, he is done."

Will Bo's condemnation open the doors to serious economic reforms at the Third Plenum in November, is a question that nobody dares to answer, but everybody raises.

Right now, it is rather difficult to follow the thinking of the new leadership, though China watchers agree that the Middle Kingdom goes through one of the repressive phases since the Cultural Revolution.

Take the crackdown on rumors.

A recent *Reuters* article explains: "China's crackdown on online 'rumor-mongering', widely seen as a tool to halt criticism of the ruling Communist Party, has chilled political discourse, with high-profile bloggers saying they have reined in sensitive posts for fear of detention".

It raises an interesting question, what is a rumor?

When read with a commentary of *The Beijing Daily*, entitled 'Do Not Leave Space for Universal Values', the anti-rumors campaign becomes even more frightening.

On September 2, 2013, an article in *The Beijing Daily* (later reprinted by many major State media) advocated 'ideological education'.

The Beijing Daily argued that "if China does not engage in ideological struggle, it could disintegrate and perish, in the same manner as the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Block."

For the past 2 decades, this has been the main fear of the leadership in Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of the Party in Beijing. In fact, several

'scientific' studies of the collapse of the Soviet Union have been sponsored by the Party to avoid the Soviet Union's fate.

The same article demonstrates the new 'high-voltage' stance of the Party: "Especially for those people who preach the so-called 'universal values,' 'constitutional democracy,' 'freedom,' and other fallacies, we cannot give any space or assistance at any time to those malicious attacks on the Party's leadership and the socialist system, to speeches that distort the history of the Party and the country, and to information that spreads rumors. We must take action to control what must be controlled, and punish those who violate the law."

Too bad for the small Internet flies and part-time bloggers!

The new campaign implies that the Party is always right: it has never committed any crime, whether during the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen events or today when it suppresses its own so-called 'minorities' such as Tibet and Xinjiang.

The Beijing Daily admits that "today, the Internet has become the main battlefield for ideological struggle."

Further, a paranoid Party sees a foreign hand (read the United States) everywhere, even when the Chinese people try to express their concerns and aspirations, through the only means they have at their disposal, the Internet.

The Beijing Daily believes that the 'Western anti-China forces' are just interested to topple China. The Party leadership is so nervous to lose its grip on 'the People' that they consider the ongoing battle as a War for survival of the Party: "We do not see gunfire in this ideological struggle, but all the

same - it is a matter of life and death. ... Dare to fight and dare to show the sword. That is the choice we must make now!"

The Bo Xilai's case should be seen in this perspective, a matter of life and death for Xi Jinping and his Party.

During an important meeting held in Beijing on August 19 and 20, Xi stated that 'propaganda and ideological work' should consolidate the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field. In clear, it means that everybody, and foremost the Party cadres, should learn Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory.

Xi directed all Party schools and academies, institutes of social sciences, and universities to study and "be clear in their adherence to the Party's principles."

On September 9, *The People's Daily* published an article on Xi's new directives. Luo Shugang, the Deputy Minister of the Propaganda Department offered a few recommendations. One of them is to "resolutely obey the CCP Central Committee led by General Secretary Xi Jinping", while another one speaks of "always adhering to the principle of the Party's control over media. The Chinese Communist Party has the absolute leadership position over all media and communication channels at all different levels."

He further announced severe punishment to those who spread 'rumors' and 'harmful information' on the Internet.

The comical part of this is that Cai Mingzhao, Director of CPC Central Office for Overseas Publicity and Ideological Work (i.e. Luo's boss) on a visit to India, told the gullible Indian journalists that Chinese people "enjoy full freedom on the Internet. We have hundreds of millions of registered Internet

users. We have more than two million Blackberry users. So, the perception that the government has placed any restrictions on the Internet is untrue.”

Cai also denied the existence of censorship of media in China. Everybody believed him.

Several questions remain. First how long can these policies work?

How long can the aspirations of the people for more freedom be suppressed?

How long can the Party retain ‘absolute leadership position over all media’ in an economically freer society?

Last question: why are the Party’s leaders sending their kids for education in the West?

The only thing which can be said right now is that the situation is not healthy. If China aspires to be a ‘normal’ great power, Stalinist policies won’t help.