

Stalinist policies won't help China in the long run¹

On August 19, an important meeting was held in Beijing; President Xi Jinping is said to have ordered "in-depth propaganda and education in socialism with Chinese characteristics so as to hold people of all ethnic groups in the nation in unity and cohesion under the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics."

Xi was addressing a national conference on ideology and propaganda attended by top central and regional party ideology officials, media censors and 'regulators'.

Old gobbledygook, you may think, but for Beijing it seems to be a question of life and death.

Xi pointed out that propaganda and ideological work are needed to consolidate the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field: "Party members and cadres should strengthen their belief in Marxism and Communism."

All Party schools and academies, institutes of social sciences, and universities should have Marxism as a required course and come to the forefront of Marxist study, research, and propaganda, he announced.

This appeal came at a time when the debate over the nation's future is raging in China; observers believe that a decision may be taken during the Third Plenum, a crucial Party meeting in November.

Since the 18th National Congress in November 2012, reformists have praised the merits of constitutionalism - power remaining in the framework of the laws of the land - versus the supreme authority of the Party.

¹ Published in ***Niti Central*** on **September 24, 2013 (URL not available)**.

Chris Buckley reported about the new campaign in the *The New York Times*: "Communist Party cadres have filled meeting halls around China to hear a somber, secretive warning issued by senior leaders. Power could escape their grip, they have been told, unless the party eradicates seven subversive currents coursing through Chinese society."

Buckley mentions an internal Party memo, known as Document No. 9 which enumerates the 'Seven Perils'; it "bears the unmistakable imprimatur of Xi Jinping," says Buckley.

The first 'Peril' is of course 'Western constitutional democracy'; according to Document No. 9: "Western forces hostile to China and dissidents within the country are still constantly infiltrating the ideological sphere."

It does not mean that everybody in China agrees.

The South China Morning Post quoted a septuagenarian Communist Party scholar who strongly rejected the current 'anti-rumor' campaign.

According to the Post, Song Huichang, a professor at the Communist Party's Central Party School in Beijing, "in a thinly veiled analogy, compared 'some current leading cadres' with the ancient King Li of Zhou, a despotic ruler of the central Chinese kingdom that preceded the Chinese empire in the 8th century BC. The decadent tyrant suppressed opposing opinions until a revolt of farmers and soldiers ended his rule and sent him into exile."

Song added: "No matter what era, do not think that by holding onto power, one can do whatever one likes and gag the people's voices."

The Marxism scholar published his views in an article published in the party school's paper *The Study Times*: "Of course, this can work for some time, but in the end [such rulers] will be ousted by the people. ...There are now

some leading cadres with confused thoughts, their mindsets are even more backward than those of those wise feudal lords."

This comes after the clampdown had started and the popular internet commentator Charles Xue, who has 12 millions followers on his Weibo microblog, was detained on charges of soliciting prostitutes.

Zhang Xuezhong, a lecturer at East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, has been banned from teaching "in violation of laws on teachers' behaviour", just because in June he published an article on constitutional reform which was deemed 'unconstitutional'

Document No. 9 also had consequences for the media. Beijing has ordered three lakh journalists working in the state-run media to attend compulsory Marxism classes. *The Global Times* announced that "between June this year and January next year over three lakh people working in the media industry are expected to receive training on journalism with Marxist values.

Xinhua justifies the move, "The modern media field in China is more "complicated" than ever before, and the media staff needs to take on more responsibility".

Parroting the Party line, Chen Lidan, a professor in journalism theory with the Renmin University of China stated: "Journalism has become a profession but some people in the industry don't have a sense of professionalism. The media should report facts without bias."

In India too, some politicians would like journalists to attend 'reeducation' courses. But based on which ideology?

According to another Chinese publication, *The Evening Post*, Ding Renren, the boss of Zhejiang's online security department warned internet users that even information shared privately among friends could lead to prosecution.

Particularly targeted is *WeChat*, a popular mobile messaging service with more than 200 million active users; it allows users to share information among 'friends'.

Nearly 3 weeks after Xi's speech, *The South China Morning Post* affirmed that Xi's remarks during the August 19 meeting were even harsher than earlier reported. The President would have spoken of building 'a strong army to seize the ground of new media'.

The Hong Kong publication says: "The wording of his speech relayed in internal briefings is far stronger. ...Xi also ordered the propaganda apparatus to form a strong internet army to seize the ground of new media."

Are we witnessing the beginning of a new Cultural Revolution?

Human rights groups have noted a strong increase in the detention of government critics and journalists since Document No 9 surfaced in April.

In June, a notice by the Supreme People's Procuratorate called on prosecutors to "resolutely crack down on activities ...with the objective of subverting state power".

Human Rights Watch believes that The New Citizen Movement, a grassroots campaign demanding the respect of citizen's rights guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution, is one of the main targets of the new campaign; its founder Xu Zhiyong and at least 16 of its members have been arrested.

In May already, the Chinese press mentioned that a prominent Chinese law professor had revealed in his *Sina Weibo* microblog that the Party had imposed a policy on university professors instructing them not to teach seven subjects.

Zhang Xuezhong teaching at East China University of Political Science and Law listed the taboo subjects (universal values, civil society, citizen rights, judicial independence, freedom of the press, past mistakes of the communist party, and the privileged capitalist class). More or less the same than the 'Seven Perils'!

Of course, Zhang's Weibo account was soon after deleted and the "Seven Speak-Nots" are now blocked on major social media in China.

Where has Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream gone?

Paradoxically, in Volume II of Xi Zhongxun's memoirs published a few days ago, the Chinese President's father argues that 'the Cultural Revolution did little good to China'.

It is sometimes difficult to understand China!