

ARCHIVES | 1989

CHINA PARTY CHIEF APPEARS TO GAIN IN POWER STRUGGLE

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 14, 1989

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to archive_feedback@nytimes.com.

An unannounced Politburo meeting has endorsed the moderate line of the Communist Party leader, Zhao Ziyang, toward student demonstrators, including more discussions with the students and limited steps toward greater democracy, Chinese with high party connections say.

The situation remains extremely unsettled, as the debate over recent student demonstrations continues to reverberate through the leadership and exacerbate the power struggle here. However, three Chinese familiar with the Politburo proceedings say that the result of a tense meeting held on Wednesday and Thursday in the capital was to strengthen Mr. Zhao's faction, favoring more rapid economic and political change over one preferring a more cautious path.

The result, at least for now, is a reversal in the fortunes of Mr. Zhao, whose influence had slipped greatly over the last year and reached its nadir at the beginning of the student protests last month. Many of the students had worried that their demonstrations might lead to his dismissal. **Students Begin Hunger Strike**

The eventual outcome of the party's internal conflicts remains uncertain, however, and officials say that further student demonstrations might affect the competition and possibly hurt Mr. Zhao. Today, students continued their protests

by taking a new tactic and going on a hunger strike to back their demands for more democracy and a meaningful dialogue with the nation's leaders.

More than 20,000 spectators watched in Beijing's Tiananmen Square as more than 1,000 university students staged the strike in the middle of the square. Some students said they would remain until Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, arrives on Monday for the first Chinese-Soviet summit meeting in 30 years. If present trends continue, Mr. Zhao may be emboldened to press for further economic and political liberalization and greater democracy. In a sign of that attitude, the People's Daily newspaper on Friday published on the top of the front page a long article calling for democracy, human rights and Government by balance of powers.

The People's Daily article attracted special attention as a sign of the rise of the more moderate grouping. It was one of the few times that the official press has mentioned the phrase "human rights" in a favorable light. In addition, the article's endorsing a system of "balance of powers" raised eyebrows because such a system had previously been implicitly criticized by the senior leader, Deng Xiaoping.

"This is a breakthrough," a young intellectual said, pointing to the newspaper. "This hasn't been written before." Deng Seems to Back Zhao

Mr. Deng did not attend the Politburo meeting, but he did send a statement in which he seemed to support the moderate approach. He also indicated that his earlier warning on April 25, calling for a crackdown on student demonstrators, was based on misleading information apparently supplied by the Beijing City Communist Party authorities, a party official said.

The support of Mr. Deng and the Politburo - actually an enlarged meeting of the Politburo, including some provincial leaders - is a crucial respite for Mr. Zhao. But party officials said that the struggle continues and noted that there are rumors that Mr. Deng will make major personnel shifts after the Chinese-Soviet meeting next week. Struggle Isn't Over Yet

"The worst stage of the fire appears to be over, but there is still danger," the party official said.

In one move to shore up support, Mr. Zhao submitted to the Politburo a letter offering to have two of his sons investigated for their commercial dealings. Some of the harshest public criticisms in recent weeks have been against corruption, especially against the way children of high officials abuse their positions to make money. Although there is no clear evidence, Mr. Zhao's sons are widely believed to

have made large sums by abusing their family positions.

It is not the first time his sons have given him difficulties. In 1981, Mr. Zhao reportedly made a self-criticism to the Politburo because of the aggressive business activities of his children.

The disagreements on how to handle the student demonstrators seemed to have accentuated the existing tensions within the leadership.

Mr. Zhao was on a visit to North Korea during some of the early demonstrations, and so he was not tainted by the Government's harsh line and threat of a crackdown on April 25 and April 26. Zhao Seeks Dialogue

After his return, Mr. Zhao made a conciliatory speech on May 4, in which he said that the students and the party had similar aims and that a dialogue was desirable between them. The major student demonstrations then ceased, and Mr. Zhao received some credit for his handling of the matter.

The next battleground may be a meeting of the Politburo scheduled to take place after the summit meeting. In addition, the Central Committee is scheduled to meet at the end of the month and a leadership fight is possible.

A version of this article appears in print on May 14, 1989, on Page 1001001 of the National edition with the headline: CHINA PARTY CHIEF APPEARS TO GAIN IN POWER STRUGGLE.