

Upheaval in China; Power Struggle Goes On in Tense Beijing

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As an intense power struggle continued behind the walled compound that houses the Communist Party headquarters, there were signs that the hard-line faction of Prime Minister Li Peng may have gained army support and consolidated control over the news media.

China's top leaders have all kept out of sight since Saturday morning, and the Government has in effect been paralyzed ever since. Tens of thousands of people continued to rally in the central square for the resignation of Mr. Li, but for now the public demonstrations by the pro-democracy movement seem a sideshow to the conflicts between top leaders that are reported to be taking place in private.

Early Wednesday, there were indications that the Politburo was making progress in resolving its deadlock, and that the party leader, Zhao Ziyang, might be making a comeback. Since then, however, most of the indications in the official news media have gone the other way. **Conflicting Signals**

Amid all the conflicting signals and rumors, and without any official announcement, an almost palpable tension has settled over the capital. The stakes of the power struggle are enormous, for Mr. Li's faction inclines toward more orthodox Communism, while Mr. Zhao is more willing to experiment and to favor rapid political and economic liberalization.

The first three reports on today's noon television news program were unmistakable in their support for the Prime Minister: a letter from the Army General Staff Headquarters warning of manipulation of the democracy movement; a report about Mr. Li sending a representative to express sympathy with the People's Armed Police; and continuing reports about letters from the provinces expressing support for Mr. Li and his declaration of a military crackdown on the democratic movement.

"In this serious political struggle which concerns the destiny of our nation, in the task of putting an end to disturbances and restoring normal order, the troops will meet with various difficulties and be faced with various tests," read the army letter, which also was printed on the front page of most newspapers.

"The turmoil created by a tiny number of people still has not been quelled. If their scheme succeeds, then the last decade of hard struggle for reform, and the work of establishing and modernizing socialism, will be destroyed in a moment."

The letter was significant not only for its tone, suggesting a harsher crackdown, but also because it indicated support from the military for martial law. There had been contradictory signs - including a letter by seven senior military figures - that some in the military were not happy with the prospect of crushing a popular uprising. China's foremost leader, Deng Xiaoping, is believed to have been traveling around the country, rallying military support, and the letter could be read as meaning both that he has been successful and that he is backing Mr. Li.

With little official news about a power struggle whose outcome is almost certain to reshape China, there is a growing fear that the disputes might be settled only through violence or a new crackdown. 'What's Going on Here?'

"It's a very dangerous situation," said an official of a Communist Party Central Committee organization, who admitted that he had no idea what was happening. His first question on seeing a foreign friend was, "What's going on here?"

The immediate threat to the students occupying Tiananmen Square has been eased, as army troops withdrew farther away on the outskirts of the capital. But the struggle within the party seems if anything to have heightened, and the soldiers who are occupying the party newspaper, People's Daily, are now carrying guns, a reporter on the newspaper said.

Mr. Li's success in gaining control over the news media would be a significant development, because previously most of China's newspapers, including the People's Daily, had been supporting Mr. Zhao.

A "working group" appointed by Mr. Li on Monday to take charge of propaganda summoned the editors in chief of China's biggest newspapers to a special meeting on Tuesday evening and read to them an attack on Mr. Zhao, said a Chinese journalist who was briefed by an editor attending the meeting. The attack specifically accused Mr. Zhao of being behind the recent student unrest and of being involved in corrupt activities.

The editor of People's Daily was sufficiently shaken by the meeting that when he returned to the newsroom, he changed several articles to make them more acceptable to the Prime Minister's faction, the journalist said.

In addition, People's Daily was obliged beginning Wednesday to submit proofs of each page to the working group before printing, another senior journalist said. And the working group wrote an editorial, apparently an attack on Mr. Zhao, which it demanded that People's Daily set in type in preparation for publication in one of the next few days.

Still, it was clear that other newspapers were supporting Mr. Zhao as strenuously as ever. The Science and Technology Daily, in a clear allusion to Mr. Li, wrote Wednesday on the front page, "The flattering courtier will be punished and judged by history." Return of Wan Li

From the competing signals, it seemed that neither side was fully in control. Help in breaking the deadlock may come from Wan Li, the head of China's National People's Congress, who arrived back in China early today after cutting short a visit to the United States for "health reasons."

The consensus had been that Mr. Wan would try to call an emergency meeting of the standing committee of the Congress to debate the situation and perhaps revoke martial law. It could even then summon the full Congress and dismiss Mr. Li.

The Chinese Government encouraged Mr. Wan to continue his trip, but he decided to come back anyway, according to Chinese familiar with his plans. However, Mr. Wan has landed in Shanghai, rather than Beijing, and it is not known when he will proceed to the capital or if he will be allowed to.

At least one acquaintance is worried that the situation is so delicate that Mr. Wan will be put in house arrest upon his arrival, to prevent him from calling the meeting. Mixed Signals From Beijing

The Chinese authorities also announced that they would again cut off satellite transmission services for foreign television networks, after just one day of allowing

the transmissions. It is not clear whether the decision to end the service holds political meaning.

It is possible to read the mixed signals from Beijing in different ways, and a plethora of rumors - and possibly intentional disinformation - are complicating the picture.

On Wednesday, for example, a Hong Kong television station was reporting accounts of a triumph by Mr. Zhao in the leadership fight, while a Hong Kong newspaper, The South China Morning Post, was giving an equally detailed account of the Politburo meeting in which he was all but dismissed.

One explanation of the lack of any outcome is simply that the leadership is waiting for Mr. Wan to return so that he can convene the National People's Congress standing committee and pursue a constitutional resolution to the political crisis, presumably in Mr. Zhao's favor. Final Decision for Deng

Another explanation is that Mr. Li's forces are consolidating their control over the press while they summon a Central Committee meeting that will announce Mr. Zhao's dismissal.

Even normally well-informed party officials said they had no idea what was happening. One senior party official expressed worry Wednesday that his telephone was tapped by enemies and joked humorlessly about spending the next decade in prison if his faction loses.

"This struggle is a tremendous drama," the official said. "It has aspects of comedy, farce and tragedy."

With reliable information increasingly difficult to get, it is even unclear who will make the decisions that will end the crisis. In part the decision will rest with the Politburo, and in part perhaps with the army, but most people seem to believe that in the end it will rest with one individual: Mr. Deng. Last Great Power Struggle

Mr. Deng, who was recently treated in the hospital for an undisclosed ailment, has been traveling across China visiting key military officials and has not taken a stand in the current power struggle, party officials say. Now he is believed to be back in Beijing, but nothing is reliably known about his view on the struggle.

Indeed, even those around him may not know. Some Chinese say they believe that Mr. Deng is playing his cards close to the vest, in what may be the last great power struggle of his career. They say they believe he is trying to draw out President Yang Shangkun and Prime Minister Li, only to discredit them in the end with a congressional investigation and impeachment process that would help set

the tone in China for resolving disputes by lawful means.

They assert that Mr. Deng would try to use that tactic to heap on them the blame for trying to suppress pro-democracy demonstrations, in the hope that a major power struggle would demonstrate that he is indispensable and give the Chinese people another reason to thank him for his leadership.

Popular demonstrations could also play a role in discrediting Mr. Li and encouraging his disgrace. Almost every major city has had rallies in recent days, and more and more the key demand has been the dismissal of Mr. Li. Other demands are made - like the resignation of Mr. Deng - but none is so common or so vigorously asserted as the call for Mr. Li to be forced out of the Government.

Steady Calls to Oust Peng

"If Li Peng does not resign, we'll demonstrate every day!" tens of thousands of student demonstrators chanted in Shanghai Wednesday. Similar criticisms of the Prime Minister have been heard throughout the nation.

A version of this article appears in print on May 25, 1989, on Page A00001 of the National edition with the headline: Upheaval in China; Power Struggle Goes On in Tense Beijing.