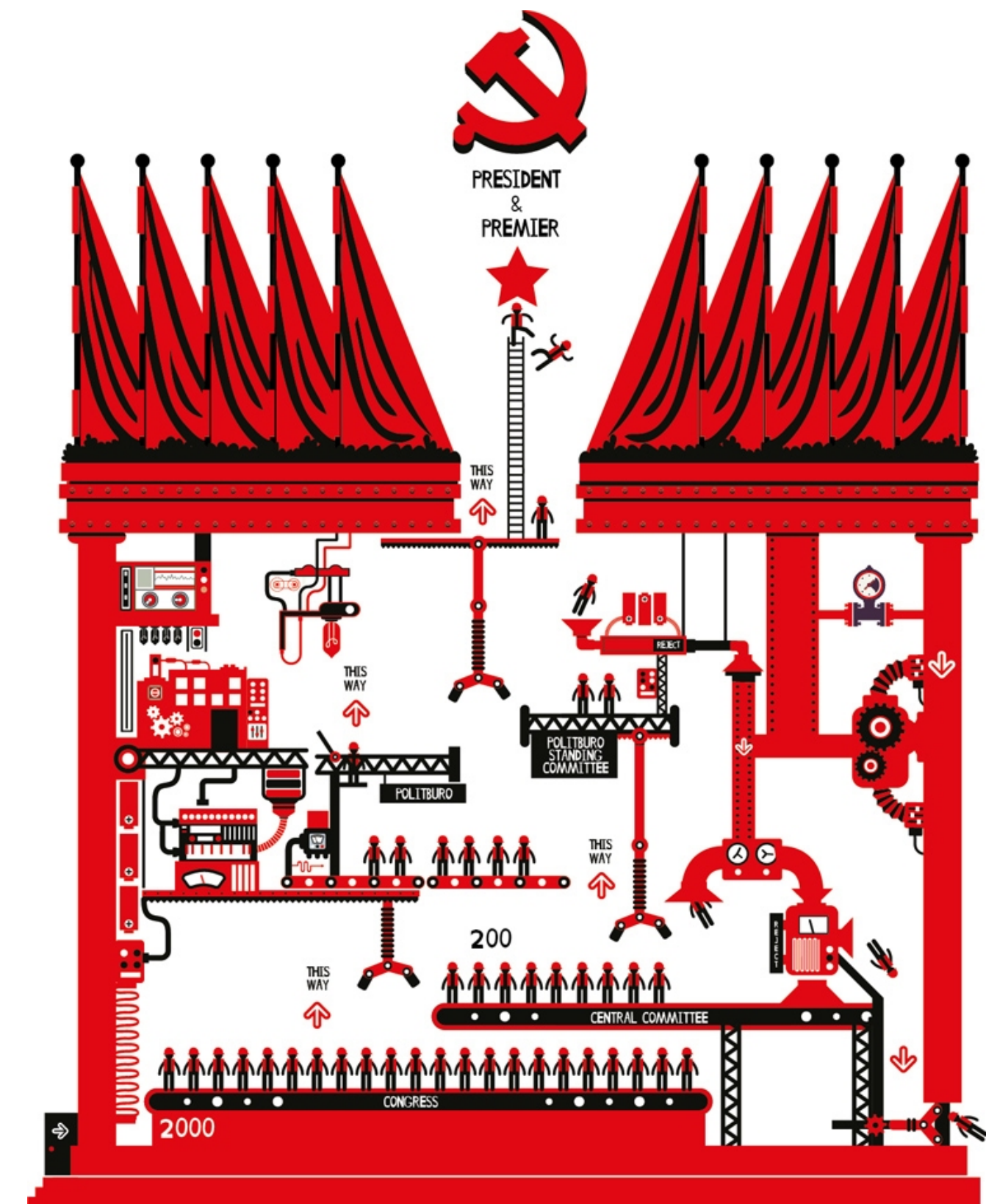


snoopers, whose job is to oversee the way China's citizens use the new technology and make sure it doesn't get out of hand. This is not simply an exercise in censorship and suppression (though there is plenty of that). It is also a way for the state to find out what irks its people, so as to head off those grievances before they become unmanageable. In the absence of elections, this is a valuable service. At the dawn of the information technology revolution in the 1990s there was a widespread hope that it spelt doom for authoritarians because they would not be able to control it. That is not what has happened. The internet has not democratised the Chinese state. Instead the Chinese state has used it to bypass democracy. Of course, it's not easy to control something as complex and multifarious as the web: it is a cumbersome and time-consuming business; it requires lots of money and lots of coercive power. That's why the only people who can do it are politicians.



Can they keep doing it? The information technology revolution is a