

Coup in Guangxi

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ALL TOO frequently, foreign observers of China make the mistake of taking for granted that events in Beijing are automatically and almost instantaneously replicated in other parts of China. This is why so little attention is paid to what is happening in China's provinces. The fact of the matter—which every one will readily admit and then proceed equally readily to ignore—is that most Chinese provinces are at least as large as the larger European countries and have quite distinct cultures and polities.

In April or May—one cannot be sure of the exact date—the central leadership in Beijing engineered a coup in the Provincial Party Committee of Guangxi, a large autonomous province with a large minority population and which shares a border with Vietnam. 'In accordance with the instructions from the Central Committee' in Beijing, Radio Nanning (13 May) said, the Secretary General of the Party Committee, the head of the Party's Organization Department, two deputy heads in the same department, a member of the Inspection Committee, the principal of the local Party school and the head of the public security department were 'resolutely thrown out of office'. Thereafter, *Guangxi Ribao* and Radio Nanning started a campaign to explain to the people of Guangxi why it was necessary to do so.

There is nothing special about this; it is the normal pattern of events in China since the late 1950s. It began with the removal of Peng Dehuai and his supporters, followed by the ouster of Liu Shaoqi and the 'capitalist roaders', followed by the elimination of Lin Biao (who was himself attempting a coup

against Mao) and his support system, followed by the 'arrest and smashing' of the 'Gang of Four', followed by the near-ouster of Hua Guofeng and the elimination of the 'two whatevers' faction which supported him. What is noteworthy about the case of the Guangxi Party Committee is that it has taken the leadership in Beijing so long to remove the local leaders who came to power during the Cultural Revolution.

Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues had the opportunity of doing so at the time of the party elections which took place twice during the last five years. They obviously could not because the leaders of the Guangxi Party Committee enjoyed the confidence of the 'masses' in Guangxi. In many other parts of China, the Cultural Revolution produced factional violence, disruption of production, persecution of intellectuals and a great deal of chaos. But in Guangxi there was little violence; the law and order situation was normal. Production not only did not suffer; it showed a steady upward trend. Even the Party Centre in Beijing has to admit this.

The editorial comments in the *Guangxi Ribao* make it quite clear that the Guangxi leaders have consistently defied the instructions from Beijing to 'eliminate the Leftist poison' of the Cultural Revolution. They have countered all the usual arguments from Beijing point by point. They have maintained that the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi was carried out in accordance with a 'correct line', that there never was any chaos, no violent 'struggles' against officials or people,

and no acts of 'fighting, smashing and robbing'. In short, Guangxi's experience of the Cultural Revolution was a positive one. Why then negate the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi?

Now the people of Guangxi are being told that all this is irrelevant. The people of Guangxi, it is being explained, supported the Cultural Revolution only 'because of their trust and belief in Comrade Mao Zedong and the Party'. Yes, it is true that there was no turmoil and production did go up 'to a certain degree'. But wouldn't the situation in Guangxi have been much better if there had been no Cultural Revolution there? In any case, what is at issue is not the specific situation in Guangxi. The issue is the Cultural Revolution as a 'cardinal question of right or wrong'. It was wrong! What was wrong in Beijing cannot be right in Guangxi. And, in any case, the province 'inevitably' was subjected to Leftist ideas. Hence, those who have been putting forward 'wrong ideas' and arguing about what actually happened in Guangxi must be 'eliminated' from the leading group. 'If we *elect* them to the leading group during reform of the organizational structure, this will be very dangerous!' (Emphasis added.) This last exhortation is Beijing's angry response to the Guangxi leaders getting elected at the 11th and 12th Party Congresses and the possibility of their staying at the top after the election to the Provincial People's Congress.

So far, none of the other provincial bodies—the local army leadership, the trade unions, etc.—have joined the chorus. Even the new leaders replacing them have not done so. They eventually will, under pressure from Beijing but it will be interesting to see in what order and after what intervals of time. The *Guangxi Ribao* editorials talk about the 'delicate' nature of the 'ideological work' which must, however, be 'handled well within this year'. The necessity for delicacy probably arises from the fact that

Guangxi borders on Vietnam and since 'a fairly large number of cadres' have been affected by 'incorrect ideology', one cannot push through a wholesale purge there.

The case of Guangxi illustrates the problems of eliminating the Cultural Revolution faction and 'Left' thinking in China. (The word Left is always put between quotation marks to show that it has a special meaning; it means those who support Mao Zedong's ideas since the Great Leap Forward.) Seven years after the death of Mao Zedong, the Chinese media is still full of daily exhortations asking the people to eliminate the 'poison' of 'Left' thinking. A single-minded programme of replacing those with Leftist ideas has met with resistance, mostly passive. The People's Liberation Army's leadership has put up the stiffest opposition. But in other sectors, the lower down one goes the more difficult it becomes to decide who is 'Left' and who is 'correct'. The party has announced a programme of screening its 38 million members, nearly half of whom joined it during the Cultural Revolution. But implementing that programme is a mind-boggling task. For such screening, the top Party leadership will have to depend on middle- and low-level cadres who themselves are utterly confused about what is 'correct' and what is not. In any case, fake compliance is a perennial problem, dragging one's feet more than common. Above all, one can always conceal one's true feelings and wave the current banner. After all, Deng Xiaoping also publicly supported many of Mao's ideas and policies which he roundly denounces now. So did many of his present-day colleagues.

Why is eliminating the 'Left' so difficult in China? The official explanation is that Leftist thinking reigned for two decades; hence its influence has gone deep. By the same token, Marxism has reigned for more than three decades. So, its influence should have sunk deeper. But the Party itself

complains constantly about how badly deficient the understanding of Marxism is not only among the people but among Party cadres!

Leftism, as symbolized by the Cultural Revolution, obviously has wide appeal in China. Its widest appeal, it seems, is among poor peasants, the young who participated in the Cultural Revolution and among the armed forces. The new system of 'responsibility' in agriculture has benefited only those with good natural conditions (good soil and irrigation) and good human factors (able-bodied young men, access to markets, etc.). Those who are not so lucky have lost the benefits of egalitarianism. In industry, only the skilled have benefited. As for the young, more than 60 per cent of Chinese population, those who missed formal education during the Cultural Revolution, can never catch up with their younger competitors. And in the People's Liberation Army, the future belongs to the urban educated ones; the ordinary soldier, almost always a peasant, can no longer hope to cross the barrier to officerdom.

Provinces, depending on their natural conditions, geographical locations and human factors have also benefited unevenly from Deng Xiaoping's new policies. The coastal provinces have benefited most; the interior ones the least. Guangxi is mountainous and

has educationally backward minorities. The vast majority of people there were probably better off, both materially and spiritually, as a result of the egalitarian policies of the Cultural Revolution.

It is difficult to establish a causal relationship, but the fact is that since the initiation of Deng Xiaoping's 'correct' policies, juvenile delinquency and economic crime have become widespread particularly in areas which are 'modernizing' fast. It is not that what was being suppressed ten years ago is being published now. Official publications admit that these are entirely new phenomena. The worst problem is that juvenile delinquency is particularly high among the children of Party cadres and economic crime is high among government functionaries.

As against all this, China's *overall* economic performance has shown a steady improvement. The educated Chinese (*zhishi fenzi*)—mistakenly translated as 'intellectuals'—are happier and can look forward to a more prosperous life. The scientists and technologies are riding a high crest. The country is becoming stronger every day. With all this to his credit, Deng Xiaoping will be able to carry through his purge in Guangxi and in other such regions of China. The resistance will become even more passive. But it will not go away.

