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CHINA'S "PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC DICTATORSHIP" :
RECENT POLITICAL TRENDS IN COMMUNIST CHINA

A Report from A. Doak **Barnett**

69-B Robinson Road
Hong Kong
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During their first years after coming to power in 1949, the Chinese Communists rapidly established firm political control over the whole country and instituted a strong party dictatorship. But complete consolidation of power takes time, and the process still continues.

In the past year, political developments of **considerable** importance have taken place in China. Some of these have been the logical culmination of five years of Communist rule. Others have been the **regime's** response to domestic tensions. Although there have been signs of internal **stress** in China, however, there has been no significant crack in the **Communists' façade** of monolithic unity. Actually, recent events seem to indicate that despite the numerous problems which they face, the dominant leaders in Communist China have successfully tightened their controls and strengthened their position during the past year. Throughout the country, political power has been further **centralized**. Among the top leaders, there have been noteworthy adjustments of power relations accomplished with comparative smoothness. And at the bottom level, the **regime's** controls over the **mass** of the population have been steadily increased.

Major political developments within China during the past year have included the following:

An energetic campaign within the Communist Party to improve discipline and unity, which suppressed high-ranking dissidents and resulted in the disappearance of at least one Politburo member and changes in the status of other top Party leaders;

Numerous steps toward centralization of administration, the most important of which was the abolition of the six major regions into which China has been divided—a step which reduced the local power of some important leaders and checked possible trends toward regionalism;

Various moves to bring military **organizations** under more effective civil and central control;

Nationwide elections, which enabled the Communists to test and weed out local cadres and to screen and indoctrinate once again the whole population;

Convocation of **Communist** China's "**first** All-China People's Congress," which was designed to give the government a new appearance of legality;

Adoption of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (which replaced the **temporary** constitutional laws under which China has been operating since 1949) and adjustment of personnel at the top level of the newly-constituted government.

All of these steps have aimed at political **stabilization** and have contributed to further consolidation of the Chinese Communists' power.

COMMUNIST PARTY UNITY CAMPAIGN

These developments began early last year. From February 6 to 10, 1954, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held a plenary session, its first in over three years, and the Party's second-ranking leader, **Liu Shao-ch'i**, demanded a "**struggle** to strengthen Party unity." (The Chinese Communist Party's constitution calls for a Party Congress every three years and Central Committee plenary sessions every six months, but the previous Congress was 7th—held in 1945--and until February 1954, the Central Committee had held no plenary session since June 1950.)

An aura of mystery and **strife** surrounded this meeting. **Mao Tse-tung**, Chairman of the Party, ~~was~~ missing, and it was officially explained that he was "**away** on holiday." Since this was the first full meeting of the top Party committee since 1950, **Mao's absence** was startling, to say the least.

At the meeting, which was attended by 61 of the 70 current members of the Central Committee, **Liu Shao-ch'i** delivered a report from the Politburo summarizing Party accomplishments since the previous session. He then called for a Party Conference later in 1954 "**to discuss the outlines of the State's first Five Year Construction Plan and other relevant questions.**" Finally, he introduced a Resolution on Strengthening Party Unity, reputedly proposed by **Mao** at the **Politburo's** meeting of December 24, 1953.

The description of this resolution on Party unity, as it appeared in the Chinese Communist press, **sounded** like a call for a major purge. "**The enemies of the people within the country have not yet been completely eliminated,**" said the official

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summary, **"and outside the country there still exists imperialist encirclement...Inveterate counterrevolutionary elements...will undoubtedly collude with foreign imperialism and take every opportunity to sabotage the cause of the Party and the people, in an attempt to defeat the revolutionary cause and restore reactionary rule in China...The greatest danger to the Party is the danger of the enemy creating sectarian activities inside the Party, and making use of a faction in the Party (if the enemy can really create such a faction) to act as his agent., .At the same time, among some of our cadres, even certain high-ranking cadres within our Party, there is still a lack of understanding of the importance of Party unity, the importance of collective leadership, the importance of consolidating and enhancing the prestige of the Central Committee...They lose their heads over certain achievements they have made in their work...They think there is no one equal to them in the wide world...They even regard the region or department under their leadership as their individual inheritance or independent kingdom...The Party must wage unrelenting struggle against those who deliberately undermine Party unity, stand up against the Party, persist in refusing to correct their errors or even carry out splitting or other dangerous activities within the Party. .The Party must take strict disciplinary action against them or even expel them from the Party when necessary."**

One of the most striking aspects of this statement was its stress on the need for unity among top Party leaders. Most disciplinary campaigns within the Chinese Communist Party in the past have been directed toward subordinate personnel; this one was aimed **"especially"** at **"the** responsible comrades of the Central Committee above provincial (or municipal) level and the high-ranking, responsible cadres in the armed forces."

After the February Central Committee meeting, an **inner-Party** campaign of "unrelenting struggle" unfolded throughout the country, especially among top-level personnel. **It was a behind-the-scenes struggle, carried on mainly in meetin'gs of the regional Party Bureaus, to "transmit the resolution of the 4th plenary session (of the 7th Central Committee) and check up Party work."** Most of these meetings took place in late March, but the one held by the Northeast Bureau in Manchuria lasted from March 26 to April 24 and involved **"more than 20 days of heated discussion."** **Throughout** this period, official Chinese Communist publications **carried** numerous articles stressing discipline, vigilance and **"collective leadership."**

Many outside observers expected the campaign to reach a climax in late 1954 with the proposed Party Conference, and it was thought that the purging of some top leaders would then be announced. This did not take place. Instead, the campaign quietly slipped into the **background**, overshadowed by other developments which occurred in about mid-year. It may still be simmering, but nothing has been heard of it recently.

In one fundamental respect the campaign appears to have

been consistent with previous Chinese Communist **"purges."** Although the Chinese Communists have periodically made coordinated efforts to tighten Party discipline, during which a certain amount of dirty linen has been publicly aired, they have **not--since Mao's** rise to undisputed authority--ever conducted a Russian-style purge involving widely-publicized physical extermination of large numbers of top-level deviationists. Up to this moment, that generalization still holds true.

However, the results of the latest Party campaign in China are still a matter for speculation, since the campaign has not been officially concluded. But it is possible to make a good guess on what it was all about and what it accomplished. There are reasons to believe that it was precipitated by the most serious crisis within the Chinese Communists* leadership since the Party came to power; that this crisis was caused both by policy disputes and by power rivalries; and that the disputes and rivalries have been resolved, at least temporarily, by firm imposition of a **"correct"** policy line, strong suppression of **deviationism**, effective assertion of central control, and a tough crackdown on factionalism and localism.

The real struggle within the Party undoubtedly began to come to a head during 1953, before the February 1954 Central Committee meeting, and **was** related to disputes over domestic policy (and possibly foreign policy too). Communist China started its first Five Year Plan at the beginning of **1953**, but many aspects of economic policy remained vague until October of that year, when the **"general** line of the State during the period of transition to **Socialism"** was publicized, calling for a step-by-step process of socialization for industry, commerce and agriculture. Although available evidence is scanty, policy debates preceding announcement of the "general line" probably concentrated on the question of **how** fast the process of socialization should be, and the "general line" as published may well represent a **compromise** solution.

During the summer of **1953** before the **"general** line^H was elaborated, Chinese Communist policy on the pace of **socialization** had vacillated, particularly in the field of agricultural collectivization, but after November the process of socialization steadily accelerated. Obviously the views of those who feared that the Party might already be moving too fast in suppressing private enterprise and forcing peasants into preliminary forms of collectivization were overruled. On the other hand, the **"general line"** in a basic sense retained a policy of gradualism (at least by comparison with the period of the Soviet **Union's** first Five Year Plan) in that it called for continued toleration of some private enterprise during the **"transition** period" and a step-by-step **"transformation"** rather than a direct, immediate plunge toward complete socialization. There are hints that at least a few Party leaders favored a more precipitous course, but that they too were overruled.

Promulgation of the **"general** line" laid down the

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"correct" policy which all Party members must accept, and during 1954 a tremendous indoctrination and propaganda campaign was carried on throughout China to spread knowledge of it. But although this policy problem now appears to have been "solved" in a relative sense, no absolute and final solution is really possible, because **differences** of opinion within the Party on the pace of socialization can be expected to continue. Even since promulgation of the general line, several changes of pace have occurred. During 1954, the Chinese Communists kept speeding up their program of agricultural collectivization by raising their targets for the numbers of producer cooperatives to be organized, so that by the end of the year their program appeared to be much more rapid than it had been even a year earlier. In all probability, plans regarding the pace of socialization can be expected to change again in response to the program's successes and failures, and within the Party the issue of whether to push forward or ease up will continue to be a subject for important policy debates.

Although differences of opinion on policy were clearly a factor in the Party disciplinary campaign, they **were** overshadowed, if one can **judge** on the basis of published reports, by **actual** or incipient power rivalries and tensions among the top Party leadership. Almost all reports on the campaign emphasized primarily the dangers of individual "conceit" on the part of Party leaders and the need for stronger, central collective leadership. The dominant leaders obviously feared the growth of independence on the part of some of the Party's regional and organizational bosses, in particular those administering the six major regions of the country, and were determined to reassert central control.

Ever since the Communists came to power in China, a handful of outstanding revolutionary leaders have administered, with considerable scope for local initiative, the **key** regions into which China has been divided. Although always directly subordinate to the Party's Politburo and the Central Government in Peking, many of these regional leaders have occupied the highest Party, government and **army** posts in the large regions, and their local power has contained an inherent threat--more potential than actual, but real nonetheless--to the **Party's** basic desire for centralization of power. By the beginning of 1954 the dominant Party leaders obviously decided that it was time to tighten central control not only within the Party but also in the related **organizational** structures of the government and army in order to forestall the possibility of regionalism developing to the point where it might endanger China's system of centralized administration. The Party campaign **was** essential to this centralizing task, since the Party is the primary channel of absolute authority in Communist China.

The most notable casualty of the Party unity campaign has been **Kao Kang**. Kao was a key Politburo member, Party boss of the vital region of Manchuria, and head of the important State Planning **Commission**. Since the early part of 1954 he has disappeared completely from public **life** in China. There are some

other leaders also whose whereabouts and activities have become obscure since the Party unity campaign began, and it is possible that they too have been **victimized** by the campaign, although at this point it is by no means certain. One of the most important of these is Jao Shu-shih, formerly Party **chief** in the East China region and later head of the important central Organization Bureau of the Party; nothing has been heard of him in recent months. Li Li-san and Chen Shao-yu, both of whom were top Party leaders in the period before Mao Tse-tung's ascendancy, have also slipped into the background. But since in China Party leaders have sometimes disappeared from view for long periods only to reappear at a later date, it is impossible to identify the **campaign's** victims definitely until the Chinese Communists choose to publicize their names. **Possibly** this will be done when a Party Conference is convened. Party conferences, composed of representatives of the **Party's** provincial organizations, have less authority than full-dress Party congresses, but they can remove up to one-fifth of the members of the Central Committee, and this may be the purpose of the conference promised by Liu Shao-ch'i. In any case, although the conference is already overdue, it is likely to be held eventually, and then the results of the campaign within the Party will probably become clearer.

ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRALIZATION

Regardless of who finally receives the **ax** (organizationally or literally) as a result of the Party unity campaign in China, important changes in the administrative structure of the government and **army** as well as of the Party have already occurred since the February 1954 Central Committee meeting. These changes significantly increase centralized control. Since February 1954, the large-region level of organization has been or is in the process of being eliminated from the structure of all the pillars of Communist power in China— Party, government, army, and so on.

The elimination of regional **organizations** in the six large administrative regions significantly alters the structure of power within China and affects the status of numerous key Chinese Communist leaders. **A majority** of the men who have lost their regional jobs continue to hold important posts, but they have been shifted from the regions where they have exercised so much influence since 1949, separated from the temptation of local empire-building, drawn more closely into central government affairs in Peking, and placed under the watchful eyes of **the Party's** "collective leadership."

The most dramatic step in this centralization process was the abolition of the Administrative Committees in China's six major regions--Northeast, North, East, Central South, Southwest, and Northwest. This took place in June 1954. At the same time the number of provinces in China was reduced from 30 to 26 by the merger of four existing provinces with other areas (Ningsia was absorbed by Kansu, Suiyuan by Inner Mongolia, and Heilungkiang by

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Sungkiang, while Liaotung and Liaohsi were merged to become Liaoning), a move which also helped to centralize administrative control.

Less dramatically and more slowly, steps have been taken to bring China's military organization under closer central control. The four Field Armies, each of which has been closely associated with regional leaders, have been steadily reduced in importance, and reorganization of the army has proceeded quietly. It is possible that the Field Armies will ultimately be completely dissolved. Late in 1954, when a new constitution was announced, a Ministry of Defense directly under the Cabinet was established for the first time, bringing the military under direct supervision of the top body for civil administration to a greater degree than ever before.

Finally, toward the end of 1954, the Party began to dissolve its own Party regional bureaus. This, the final action required to eliminate any important layer of administration between the central authorities and the provinces, is still under way. To date, three of the six bureaus have closed up.

The steady centralization of power strengthens the position of the dominant Party leadership in China, and tensions existing within the Communist ranks are probably under better control than they were a year ago. The fact that a dissident or deviationist leader of Kao Kang's stature has been deposed indicates that the inner Party struggle has been a serious one; the fact that he has been pushed into the background with so little indication of open conflict indicates that the inner Party struggle has been largely successful, at least so far.

ELECTIONS AND THE NATIONAL CONGRESS

While all of these moves toward political centralization were under way during 1954, the Chinese Communists also pushed forward with long-delayed plans to consolidate their government structure by holding national elections, convening their first National People's Congress and promulgating a constitution.

Preparations for national elections had begun many months earlier, in January 1953. At that time it was announced that the elections were to be held before the end of 1953, but the regime, burdened with tremendous domestic and foreign problems, was unable to keep to this schedule, and the target date was postponed. In early 1954, however, preparation were energetically stepped up.

The purpose of the elections was to choose representatives for congresses at every level of government administration in China, from the villages to the national level. When the Communists first took over power in China they set up appointed "representative" bodies but promised that these would be converted into elective bodies in due time. The interim "representative

conferences" which started functioning after 1949, were forums (attended by men and women who had been hand-picked by the communists) which gave a certain appearance of democratic representation, provided an important instrument for mobilising the populace to implement Communist policies, and in a sense gave the regime a soundboard for determining public attitudes and opinions. By 1953 the top Communist leaders obviously felt that their position **was** sufficiently consolidated to proceed with the formality of converting these bodies from appointed to elected congresses, as promised. This conversion was essentially a formality, because no basic change in the character of these controlled bodies was contemplated.

It was significant that a nationwide census and preparation for the elections proceeded simultaneously. Obviously one of the **regime's** aims in conducting elections was to put the whole population through a systematic screening even more thorough than those which had previously been possible. Both the census and election registration lagged behind schedule, but by mid-1954 they were brought near to completion.

The census was completed first. According to the **official**, published results the registered population of China (in 1953) totaled 574 million. To this figure the Communists added over eight million (estimated) in China's border regions, and over 19 million overseas, in Formosa and elsewhere, bringing the total Chinese population to roughly 602 million. **This tabulation** provided essential data on the potential electorate.

Election registration followed the census-taking. It was carried out under the guidance of about two and one-half million cadres in Communist China's **214,000** basic electoral units in villages, factories, schools and other **organizations**. Persons over 18 were eligible to register unless "deprived of political **rights**" or disenfranchised for other reasons. Election cards were issued to **323** million people. Official statements claimed that less than 3 per cent of the potential electorate was disenfranchised, but one can be certain that regardless of how many people were finally labeled as political enemies of the regime, the registration process provided an opportunity for a careful probing of individual political attitudes.

When the elections finally took place, they bore almost no resemblance to elections in the West. But they were of significance nonetheless in terms of tightened Party control over the masses and of supervised mass participation in the political process. There was no competition between parties. There were no competing programs. And once the candidates were selected with Party guidance, there were no important public contests between candidates. There was, however, an opportunity to test the cadres, weed out laggards and promote activists. There was also an opportunity for extensive and intensive propaganda on the "**general** line," the proposed new constitution, and so on. And the general population was **mobilized** to stand up and be counted.

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The elections did not take place simultaneously all over the country. Instead, they proceeded slowly, area by area, after local political screening, **registration** and thorough preparation had been completed. In most of China, the so-called basic level elections, in villages and other first-stage electoral units, were completed by early spring 1954, and **according** to official claims, 278 million people, or 86 per cent of registered voters, took part in them. These elections were conducted, significantly, by open show of hands; apparently the Chinese Communists, although firmly entrenched, do not feel ready to experiment with the secret ballot, despite their monopoly of political control and power.

The net result of the basic level elections was the careful selection of a fairly broad, Party-approved base for local government in China. Altogether, over five and one-half million people were elected to congresses of the lowest level, and these persons, whose main function is to support and help implement government policies, were drawn from all the strata of the population which are still acceptable to the regime.

Once the local elections were finished, it did not take long to complete the national electoral process, since the general public did not participate in elections of representatives to higher congresses. Under the hierarchical setup of government in Communist China, the local congresses elected representatives to **hsien** (county) and municipal congresses; these in turn chose representatives to provincial-level congresses which finally elected the membership of "China's first All-China People's Congress." By mid-1954 the urgent need to complete this series of steps, so that a national congress could be convened by fall, led the authorities to skip over some of the formalities; an approved list of national congress delegates was passed down to the provincial congresses to speed things up. Finally, approximately 1,200 delegates were elected by provincial congresses, as well as by minority, army and Overseas Chinese groups, and the stage was set for the long-heralded national congress.

The congress met in Peking for about two weeks during September 1954. It was the occasion for many speeches (including a few important policy reports), meetings, and demonstrations which were intended to **symbolize** the solidarity of the regime. The real **business** of the congress had been carefully prepared during the months preceding September, however, so its two basic tasks were accomplished with dispatch. On September 20 it passed the Constitution of the **People's** Republic of China, and thereafter it quickly approved nominees for top posts in the new government.

THE NEW CONSTITUTION

During the five years between 1949 and 1954, China had no full-fledged national constitution; two documents, the Common Program of the **Chinese People's** Political Consultative Conference and the Organic Law of the Central People's Government, provided

the main, provisional, constitutional basis for the regime. The outlines of government structure and policy contained in these documents were adequate for the first years of Chinese Communist rule, but by the end of 1952 the need was felt for some changes in both structure and policy (both of which are dealt with in Chinese Communist constitutional documents), and the time was ripe for Communist **China's** first full-fledged constitution. In November 1952, the Central **People's** Government Council set up a 33-member Committee on the Drafting of a National Constitution, and some time later the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party handed to the Drafting Committee a proposed constitution. This was soon polished up and made into a Draft Constitution, which was then submitted to the **People's** Government Council and approved in **June 1954**. Between June and November the draft was discussed by organized groups throughout China, and after a few minor changes it was presented to, and approved by, the national congress. This new constitution defines basic policies and organizational forms which are likely to remain fairly stable in China as long as the Communist regime is still undergoing the "period of transition to **Socialism**."

There have been no fundamental changes in the principles of government in China as a result of adoption of the constitution. The government still maintains the form of a "**United Front**," which **includes** selected **non-Communists** and is supposed to represent the interests of a class coalition, and it is still completely controlled by the Communists. The distribution of power is still based on the principles of "**democratic centralism**," in which all final authority is in the hands of the highest government body; restricted powers and functions are delegated down the chain of command to lower bodies in the government, but every level is held in check by the appointive and veto power **held by** the level above. The structure of government is still patterned on the old hierarchical system **in** which there is a representative body (congress) at each level which chooses an executive-administrative organ (council) to govern in its name and also elects representatives to the next higher level of government administration. The government is still established on the principle that the congresses and councils centralize power at each administrative level; the idea of establishing checks and balances or operating on the basis of separation of powers is rejected. Although this basic framework of government remains unaltered, the new government does introduce some changes of considerable interest.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TRENDS

The Central Government is dealt with in the new constitution under three headings: the **National People's** Congress, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China, and the State Council. Changes in the role and relationship of these three elements, as compared with their **equivalents** which existed in the Chinese government from **1949** to **1954**, raise some unanswered questions about top-level political developments in Communist China.

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The National People's Congress, according to the constitution, is **"the** highest organ of state powerⁿ in China. This unicameral body, elected every four years by provinces, autonomous regions, special municipalities, the armed forces, and Overseas Chinese, is labeled **"the** only organ exercising the legislative power of the State" (but this is misleading, since it applies only to major **"laws"** and not to the **"administrative measures," "decisions," "orders,"** and **"instructions"** which emanate from lower levels and have the force of law). In theory, the functions and powers of the National People's Congress are most impressive. It amends the constitution, enacts laws, supervises enforcement of the constitution, elects the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the **People's Republic,** and **"decides"** (on the basis of recommendations from the **Chairman**) who shall be Premier, Ministers in the State Council, or members of the National Defense **Council.** It also is empowered to decide on the national economic plan, the State budget, boundaries of major administrative areas, general amnesties, and questions of war or peace. But in actuality the Congress is not as important as it sounds. It meets only once a year for a single brief session (its members are not full-time legislators but are people with other regular jobs **in** various parts of the country) and it obviously will have little to do with the continuous task of governing.

It appears on paper that the most powerful body in the government under the new constitution is the Standing Committee of the National **People's** Congress, elected by the Congress as its **"permanent body."** It meets fortnightly and functions continuously during the long period between Congress sessions. Although **re-**sponsible to the Congress, the Standing Committee has wide powers which it will, in practice, perform on its own. It not only has power to **"interpret** the laws," but its decree-making power in effect makes it the top legislative body except for the brief periods when the full Congress meets. It **"supervises"** the work of all other government bodies, including the State Council, Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's **Procuratorate.** It also can annul any decisions or orders of the State Council or the regional administrative bodies under it, and this veto makes it on paper the most powerful organ in the government. Its many other powers include appointment or removal of Vice-Premiers and Ministers **as** well as **deputy** chiefs of the Court and Procuratorate, ratification or abrogation of treaties with foreign states, and appointment or recall of envoys abroad, military **mobilization** and proclamation of a state of war, and so on.

The Chairman of the Republic, elected by the Congress for a four-year term, does not look very important in the provisions of the new constitution. **His** constitutional powers are mainly procedural; almost everything he does--such as promulgating laws and decrees, ordering mobilization or proclaiming a state of war, making numerous appointments, and so on--must be based on prior decisions by the Congress or its Standing Committee. (The Chairman does, however, **"recommend"** to the Congress candidates for Premier, as well as for some other top government positions.) He does not play a direct role in, or belong to either the Standing

Committee of the Congress or the State Council—the two important governing bodies under the new constitution. He can, however, play a mediating role between these two bodies by convening a so-called Supreme State Conference composed of the Vice-chairman of the Republic, the Chairman of the Standing Committee, the Premier, and **"other persons concerned."** Such a conference does not have independent powers, but it can **"submit views"** to the Congress, Standing Committee, or State Council. The only organizational body in the government which is actually headed by the Chairman of the Republic is the National Defense Council, a large military organ apparently primarily advisory in its purpose. All in all, the Chairman, at least on paper, does not hold the reins of day-to-day government administration in his hands. Liu Shao-ch'i, in describing the new constitution, has said: **"The functions and powers of our head of State in our country are jointly exercised by the Standing Committee [which Liu heads] ...and the Chairman of the People's Republic of China."** The post of Chairman is described by the magazine China Reconstructs, published in Peking, as follows: **"The office of the Chairman of the People's Republic of China, then, carries no independent power. It does not affect the integrity of either the National People's Congress or the State Council. It does, however, provide a great, simple symbol of the unity of the State,"**

The State Council (Cabinet), according to the constitution, is **"the highest organ of State power"** and **"the highest administrative organ of the State."** It is referred to as **"the Central People's Government,"** an elevation of status as compared to the previous Cabinet which it succeeds. The State Council is composed of a Premier, ten Vice-Premiers, a Secretary-General and all the Ministers and Heads of Commissions in the government. It meets monthly, and since it is the primary executive branch of the government, it clearly carries the day-to-day burden of governing. Although the State Council cannot pass **"laws,"** it can formulate **"administrative measures"** and **issue "decisions"** and **"orders"** with the force of law, subject to veto only by the Congress or Standing Committee. All local government and administration in China comes under its direction and control.

It is interesting to note that although the acts of the State Council can be vetoed by the Standing Committee, the Premier himself can be appointed or removed only by the full National People's Congress, a fact which limits the control of the Standing Committee over the Premier.

Another important feature of the State Council is the fact that provision is made (in a supplementary Organic Law rather than in the constitution itself) for a small group which could be labeled an **"inner Cabinet,"** authorized to exercise all the **powers** of the full State Council. The **"inner Cabinet"** is made up of only 12 men: the Premier, the ten Vice-Premiers and the **Secretary-General.**

This organizational **structure** at the peak of government

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is modeled on both the Russian government and the previous Chinese Communist government, but there are significant differences between the **new** structure and its models. In the USSR, the Chairman heads the Presidium of the bicameral Supreme Soviet, and is not a person above and separate from key organs within the government. On paper, the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet, is responsible to the Presidium. In practice, the Chairman and the Presidium are relatively unimportant, and the locus of real power within the government is the Council of Ministers. In the previous Chinese Communist Government, the Chairman headed the Central **People's** Government Council, the most powerful body in the government. Under the **People's** Government, and responsible to **it**, was the Government Administration Council, or Cabinet. In practice, the Chairman was the real executive leader, and there was a clear-cut chain of command from the Chairman and the People's Government Council **which** he headed, to the Premier and Government Administration Council.

The new Chinese Government does not fit either of these patterns, however. The chain of command is much less clear than **it was** before in China and obviously different from what **it is** in the USSR. Now, the Chairman has been separated from the **key** functioning bodies, yet he is undoubtedly not a mere figurehead. On paper the Standing Committee holds the decision-making power, and the State Council is responsible to **it**, but **it is** by no means fully clear what the relationship between these two bodies is, or what kind of relationship they now have to the Chairman.

TOP LEVEL PERSONNEL

An attempt to understand the meaning of these changes requires an examination of the personnel of the new government, because distribution of power in a Communist State cannot be determined simply from **organizational** charts,

Formerly, **Mao Tse-tung**, who has been undisputed leader of the Chinese Communist movement for over twenty years, was Chairman of the **Republic** and also of the **People's** Government Council; he and the **Council** exercised highest decision-making power. Under the Council was the Government Administration Council, headed by Premier Chou En-lai, who held the number two post within the government but was clearly subordinate to Mao and the People's Government Council.

Now, **Mao** is still Chairman, but he does not head the Standing Committee, and his **post** is obviously less important than before.

Liu Shao-ch'i, one of the two main contenders for succession to Mao Tse-tung (Chou En-lai is the other), heads the Standing Committee. **It** is significant that this is the **first** time **Liu** has taken charge of an important functioning body within the government, even though he has consistently been ranked

No. 2 within the Party. But the composition of the Standing Committee under Liu is not very impressive. It is a large "United Front" sort of group, heavily weighted with persons such as the boy Dalai Lama from Tibet. Although the Standing Committee contains three Politburo members of the Party, only five of the 13 Vice-Chairmen are Party members, and of the Standing Committee's 65 regular members only 34 belong to the Communist Party. It is difficult to imagine such a conglomerate group, almost half of whom are non-Communists, actually making decisions on major policy questions,

The State Council, headed by Premier Chou En-lai, is a far more impressive body in terms of its personnel. Of its total membership, including the Premier, ten Vice-Premiers, the Secretary-General and 35 members, 29 belong to the Communist Party. Every member of the "inner Cabinet" is on the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (two are on the Politburo). This is the most impressive single grouping of men within the government, and it is a group which it is easy to imagine as playing a decision-making role,

Where then does real power rest in the government? For the first time since the Chinese Communists came to power this is not wholly clear. One Chinese political scientist, writing in the Far Eastern Survey, says "the real locus of power seems to be the Chairman of the People's Republic." An astute foreign observer in Hong Kong writes in the China News Analysis that "the eclipse of Mao Tse-tung's governmental power is total"; in the view of this writer, Liu Shao-ch'i has become the real power in the Chinese government. Another well-informed observer in Hong Kong says: "Obviously, Chou En-lai holds the key job now; Mao has withdrawn, and Chou's 'inner Cabinet' is much more important than Liu's Standing Committee."

These differences of opinion show how little certainty there can be about interpretation of many developments in Communist China. They also show, however, that the formerly clear lines of authority in China have been blurred by recent changes. It is now possible to argue about the distribution of governmental power in China; this in itself is a significant fact.

My own guess about the meaning of the recent changes—and it is a guess--would be as follows:

Mao Tse-tung seems clearly to have withdrawn to a great extent from day-to-day responsibilities of government administration. He was absent from the February Central Committee meeting; during 1954 he made few public appearances, and almost no important policy statements. Facts such as these led to speculation that he had been eclipsed. However, there is no present evidence that he has been pushed into the background by competing Party leaders. His years of leadership and unique prestige make it seem unlikely that others have taken over his power against his will. Also, although public adulation of Mao has been slightly less fulsome

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during the past year than previously, he still occupies a position of importance.

One possible explanation for **Mao's** withdrawal toward the background of affairs is health. There have been many rumors about his being in poor health, and there may be some basis for them. It is noteworthy that under Mao there is now only a single Vice-Chairman, venerable and noncontroversial Chu Teh, who is empowered to **take** over not only in the event of the **Chairman's** death but also if the Chairman "for reasons of health be unable to perform his duties for a long **time.**" These are merely straws in the wind, but they do lend some credence to the theory that poor health may have forced Mao to reduce his direct participation in government affairs, and that the drafters of the new constitution may have had in mind the possibility of **Mao's** death or incapacity, and the consequent problems of succession or distribution of **power.**

From **his** place in the background, of course, Mao **may** still continue to **play** a key role in making major policy decisions within the Party Politburo--which in the last analysis is more important than any government body in China--and even within the government his importance has by no means **disappeared.** His unique prestige makes him a unifying force. By calling a Supreme State Conference he can mediate between the Standing Committee and **State** Council if tensions complicate their relations. And as chief of National Defense Council and head of **China's** military forces he obviously is in a vital position, because military power is still a basic factor in politics within China, and in a sense military leaders hold the key to the future unity or disunity of the regime.

However, with Mao comparatively speaking on a pedestal rather than directly at the helm of government, power and responsibility within the government seem to have been diffused. Both Liu **Shao-ch'i** and Chou En-lai now hold extremely important posts. Legally, **Liu** has supreme power. Administratively, Chou heads the body with the most important membership. There is undoubtedly a sharing and balancing of power between these two men. The situation is one which could be a prelude either to some form of collective leadership, or to a serious struggle for power, if Mao passes completely out of the picture.

OTHER GOVERNMENT TRENDS

The new distribution of top level power is at the moment the most interesting feature of the Chinese government, but a few other trends are worth noting in passing.

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese **Communists' façade** of a "United Front" has been maintained. Not only do the **National** People's Congress and its Standing Committee contain sizeable numbers of non-Communist members, but the People's Political Consultative Conference, which was appointed by the Communists in

1949, continues to exist as an advisory "organization of the Chinese **People's** Democratic United Front," even though it has been displaced as the top *representativeⁿ body in the government by the National People's Congress. It held a large meeting of its Second National **Committee in** December, following the meeting of the People's Congress. The Chinese **Communists'** so-called "**United Front**" is a **façade**, however, in terms of political power. It does not represent an alliance of several real, independent, political parties; instead it is merely a channel for participation in the government of several weak, non-Communist political groupings, and of Communist-controlled mass **organizations**, which **serve as** satellites to the Communist Party and must completely back its program. Nonetheless, it is significant that at this stage in their revolution the Chinese Communists still feel it is desirable to make some conciliatory gestures toward non-Communist groups and individuals (including some ex-warlords).

In the setup of Ministries and Commissions, there have been a number of changes, but in an overall sense the changes have not been great. Four new organs of Ministry rank have been created, and the status of a few other Ministry-level organizations has **been** altered, **but** the basic structure has not been violated. Most of the changes made appear to have been designed to increase the centralized power in the hands of the State Council. Abolition of four Cabinet committees which formerly supervised the Ministries is a step which tightens direct Cabinet control over the Ministries. Both economic planning and national defense have been brought under the Cabinet for the first time. Previously, the State Planning Commission had a special status, outside of the **Cabinet's** chain of command; this has now been changed. Formerly, the sole military organ in the government was the Revolutionary Military Council, which had a status equal to that of the **Cabinet**; now for the first time a Defense Ministry has been set up under the Cabinet, a move which strengthens civil control. (The new National Defense Council is still **outside Cabinet** control, but its powers are vague, and its role is probably only advisory.)

These and a number of other changes in the government structure do not represent any fundamental reorganization. They should probably be regarded merely as modifications, to improve government efficiency on the basis of experience gained during the years **1949-1954**, and to further the Chinese **Communists'** steady drive toward centralization of their regime.

In terms of Cabinet-level personnel, relatively few drastic changes were made when the new government was set up. Almost four-fifths of the Ministers still hold their old jobs. There were only a handful of cases--the most important of which was the case of Kao Kang--where the changes clearly had political significance; most of the others looked like administrative shifts. The principal trend observable in **the** changes was an increase in the domination of top posts by Communist Party members.

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POLITICAL POWER AT THE GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL

The system of political controls by which the Chinese Communists have consolidated their rule at the grass-roots level of Chinese society took clear shape almost as soon as the Communists came to power in 1949. Developments since then have consisted primarily of refinements and improvements in the system.

The Communist Party—which now has six and one-half million members and 335,000 basic branch organizations—constitutes the core of the ruling elite all over the country, and its hierarchy is the most important channel of authority and control. Its branches reach into all parts of China and into every level of Chinese society. This elite has expanded only slowly since 1949, and it is still composed predominantly of persons who belonged to the Party before the Communists came to power. Since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party has admitted only about two and one-half million new members and has expelled perhaps one-half million, so that roughly four million trace back to the period of the revolutionary struggle for power. All Party members, old and new, are under strict discipline. Decision-making power is concentrated in the Central Committee, which now has 70 members, and in the Politburo, which currently has ten known members, if one excludes Kao Kang. Party rule is exercised through the government, army, and mass organizations of numerous sorts. Through public security garrisons and militia, people's congresses and councils, public security police and committees, people's courts and tribunals, propaganda and indoctrination organs, and many mass political organizations, the Chinese Communists have established unprecedented control over the Chinese people and have made considerable progress toward regimentation of the entire population.

Among the most important developments in the system during 1954 were the rescreening of the population through elections and the regularization of local government through selection of new congresses and councils, which have already been described. There were several other significant trends during the year also. One of these was an intensification of public security police activities. In 1954, the Chinese Communists, after a brief period of comparative relaxation, began again to stress the threat of a counterrevolutionary activity and to clamp down on any hint of dissidence. During the year they also extended and legalized a system of forced labor throughout their penal institutions. At the same time, the use of law as an instrument of political control was further developed with the organization of labor courts and special courts in industrial and transportation areas. All of these things strengthened the regime's controls over the mass of the population.

On the last day of 1954, one further development took place which was a fitting climax to a year characterized by increased centralization and consolidation of political control. On December 31, three regulations were promulgated outlining a more systematized structure of control over city dwellers in

China, The structure consists of **Residents'** (Inhabitants') Committees, Street Offices (**Bureaus**), and Public Security (Police) Sub-Station. All of these organs have been developed experimentally over the past few years, and therefore are not new, but the December regulations formalized them into a uniform system,

Under this system, city inhabitants are supposed to be organized on the basis of areas containing 100 to 600 households, which are subdivided into smaller groups of from 15 to 40 households, called Residents' Teams. Each **Residents'** Team selects one representative to a general **Residents'** Committee, which represents the larger area. These **Residents'** Committees, **elected** annually, are called "mass and autonomous organizations of residents," but in fact they are a direct extension of centralized government administration. Their duties are defined as follows: "Undertake public **welfare** work for residents; reflect **the views** and demands of residents to the local People's Councils or their deputed organs; mobilize residents to respond to government calls and to observe laws; direct mass security **work**; mediate over disputes among residents." Municipal government bodies can "assign tasks" to the Committees, and residents under them are expected to "observe the resolutions and compacts" **which** the Committees decide **upon**. Funds for the living allowances and expenses of Committee members come from the government, but the Committees can solicit money for public welfare work from their residents.

Street Offices are strictly government organs, established in larger cities or city districts with a population of 50,000 or more. Their function is to create a closer link between the municipal or district government and the mass of people by directing the work of Residents' Committees and in general "maintaining close contact between the **government** and inhabitants." The personnel of a Street Office **consists** of a director (and deputy if necessary), several secretaries, and three to seven full-time cadres, **all** appointed and **paid** by the municipal or district government. The jurisdiction of such an Office usually corresponds to that of a Public Security Sub-Station.

The Public Security **Sub-Station**s are small, local police posts, consisting of a chief, one or two deputies, and several policemen. They are branches of the municipal or hsien (county) Public Security Bureaus and are responsible for law enforcement, maintaining "social order," crime prevention, suppression of counterrevolutionaries, direction of Security Committees organized among inhabitants, and welfare work. In addition, they are expected to maintain close contact with the masses, receive and deal with letters, calls, and **criticism** from residents, and to take part in meetings of **Residents'** Committees.

The purpose of this system is quite clear: to organize **all** urban inhabitants and bring them under closer direct control of both the civil administration and the police organs of city governments. There is a long tradition in China for organizing

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the population in this fashion, but the system now legalised by these new regulations is probably more thorough, and one would guess more onerous to ordinary people than the traditional pao-chia system which the Chinese Communists abolished with much fanfare when they first came to power.

A FURTHER STAGE IN CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

The year 1954 represents a significant new stage in the Chinese Communists' consolidation of **their "People's Democratic Dictatorship."** The Party unity campaign, administrative centralization, government regularization, and tightening of controls mean that the dominant leaders of the Chinese Communist Party probably have firmer control at home than ever before. They have encountered some fairly serious internal stresses and strains, but they have been able, so far, to handle them with a minimum of open conflict.

The process of consolidating political power has been much smoother in Communist China than it was in Russia during the early years of the Soviet regime. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that the Chinese Communists have been able to maintain a high degree of discipline and unity within their Party. **As** long as the Party maintains **its basic** unity and its control over the instruments of power, **"public opinion"** is a factor of secondary importance, and organized expression of dissatisfaction or opposition to the regime is unlikely to develop to any significant degree.

No outside observer can really know, of course, what goes on behind the scenes in China. It is possible that the Chinese Communists face more serious internal problems than are now visible on the surface. If, for example, the deposing of Kao Kang proved to be evidence of deep-rooted and widespread factionalism **within** the Party, or if the power adjustments in the government proved to be the beginning of a struggle for power in succession to Mao Tse-tung, internal tensions in Communist China could become serious. But it would be foolish indeed, at this point, to speculate too far. At present, the Chinese Communist regime appears from the outside to be solid and strong.

A. Doak Barnett