

China Watchers: Radicals Can't

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PEKING—Intently, but just for a moment, the young Chinese man in Canton studied the Hong Kong newspaper I had brought into the People's Republic on my return from vacation.

The boldest headline on the front page announced the story that Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping had been alluded to as "China's second Khrushchev" in wall posters at Shanghai's main university—a description tantamount to a charge of treason.

"Well," I asked, "is it true?"

"I do not know," he said, unwilling to deny that Teng, the man in effective day-to-day charge of China last year now is in the same category as Liu Shao-chi, the Chinese head of state branded a Khrushchev and a traitor during the 1960s and toppled from power.

The young man in Canton is not alone in his uncertainty. Teng is the object of fierce attacks, but it is still far from certain whether he and his so-called "moderate" allies are in full retreat.

Or does it seem that the radicals are able or willing to launch another Cultural Revolution in China.

Factional political struggle has ebbed and flowed in China since the Cultural Revolution, but the starting point the current turmoil was the death of Premier Chou En-lai on Jan. 8 then the coalition which Chou had helped put together so adroitly split apart. Just one month after his death, on Feb. 6, the People's Daily launched a strong attack on

"capitalist roaders . . . in power inside the party."

A couple days later China-watchers were startled to learn that the new acting premier was not Teng, who had been functioning as a de facto premier during 1975, but Hua Kuo-feng, a younger and lower ranking vice premier with responsibilities for Internal security and agriculture. Hua was not seen as a radical, but his appointment was seen as a set back for Teng. And within days posters on university campuses in Peking and Shanghai were attacking Teng—without naming him—as a "capitalist roader."

Then came the extraordinary public admission in the People's Daily that the Central Committee of the Communist Party is split. The blame was put on "the capitalist roaders within the party who have refused to repent and reform themselves."

The stage seemed set for yet another escalation of the conflict into a more bitter and more open stage. But later, Chinese officials told westerners in effect that the campaign would be kept under strict party direction—unlike the cultur revolution which went out of control.

The conflicting groups in this struggle are usually described as the moderates and the radicals, but these terms can be misleadingly simple. When China-watchers refer to moderates, they are usually describing the leaders who survived the Cultural Revolution or who were restored to positions of power in recent years after being out in the political cold since the Cultural Revolution. Teng is the most prominent of these, but there have been literally thousands returned to party and government positions.

The generally younger radicals rose rapidly to prominence, but as the moderates returned to exercise their badly needed skills the power of many radicals was severely reduced.

One Western diplomat in Peking asserts that this double overturn of power has created such bitter resentment among radicals that they are determined to purge many of the rehabilitees in the current campaign. Once Teng is out of the way, he argues, the purge will succeed. Most of his fellow China-watchers disagree with his prediction.

A canvass of China-watchers in Hong Kong and Peking produced a loose consensus that, broadly speaking, the current conflict is between the ins (moderates, symbolized by Teng and the late Chou) and the outs (radicals, symbolized by younger men like Wang Hung-wen, the second-ranking man in the Communist Party, whose policy-making



TENG HSIAO-PING
... 'ins' vs. 'outs'

role nevertheless seems nebulous to outsiders).

The pitfalls in labelling these two conflicting groups is reflected in the unwillingness of every China-watcher interviewed to predict that the radicals would actually bring about significantly more radical policies in China's social and economic system if they came out on top in the struggle.

Most students of China, both here and in Hong Kong, don't believe the radicals will succeed. While

repeatedly stressing that their predictions are based on limited information, most believe there will not be a large-scale shakeup of China's political leadership structure.

Teng himself, according to this majority view, has been seriously hurt by the attacks and quite possibly could fade from view. But the same cannot be said for thousands of other rehabilitees and experienced officials who form a powerful nationwide web that extends deep into the Communist Party, the government and the armed forces. This is a persuasive analysis except for the nagging memory of the Cultural Revolution, when another powerful web of influential officials was smashed.

One observer here suggests that the radicals have an insoluble dilemma: "If they launch an all-out struggle, publicly challenging powerholders all over the country and bringing their supporters and their wall posters onto the streets, the resulting turmoil will provoke a fast and harsh suppression by the powers that be—including, perhaps, the army. But if

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they hang back and confine their struggle to the newspapers and the campuses, it will burn out and be co-opted by the power-holders.

The factor creating the most uncertainty seems to be the role of Chairman Mao tse-tung. According to the official press, Mao "personally initiated" the debate on education late last year. After Chou's death, when the education debate evolved into the current debate on China's political future, Mao must have given at least tacit approval to the broad attacks on "the capitalist roaders within the party" who have refused to repent and reform themselves. Yet, so far, Mao has stopped short of giving the new attacks against "capitalist roaders" his explicit blessing.

Mao probably played an important part in choosing Hua as acting premier, even though Hua cannot be described as a member of the radical camp. It is even possible that in his unique way Mao is trying to encourage a creative tension between radical and moderate forces. But no one is certain how this tension will be resolved.