

Hu Leadership Focuses on Compassionate Conservative Governance

H. LYMAN MILLER

The four-month period between the 16th Party Congress held in November 2002 and the 10th National People's Congress (NPC) scheduled to open in March 2003 is transitional. The senior party leaders around Jiang Zemin who retired from their party positions are serving out the waning months of their terms in top posts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) state hierarchy, awaiting full retirement at the NPC. Meanwhile, the younger leaders around new party General Secretary Hu Jintao who succeeded them on the party Politburo await accession to the top state posts at the NPC. Despite the transitional nature of the pre-NPC period, the new party leaders have already begun work in roles that suggest the overall priorities of the new leadership. In particular, Hu Jintao has been at the center of efforts to present the new leadership as focused on the plight of those left behind in China's prosperity, on clean government and the rooting out of corruption, on the rule of law, and on greater transparency in leadership workings.

PREPARING FOR THE NPC

PRC media have indicated that the upcoming NPC will focus on a new streamlining and restructuring of the State Council, the executive branch of the Chinese state presided over by the premier. The reorganization will be the fifth in the last 20 years. In particular, according to the PRC-controlled Hong Kong newspaper *Wen wei po*, the number of State Council ministries will be reduced from 29 to 22 or 23, and a number of supraministerial commissions will be established to coordinate China's phased compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements, oversee an anticipated reform of China's finance and banking institutions, and direct other priorities. One big winner in the reorganization is expected to be the State Development

Planning Commission (SDPC), which would absorb administrative functions from several other commissions and ministries.¹ The SDPC's new prominence may explain the promotion of its minister, Zeng Peiyan, to the party Politburo at the party congress in November 2002. (It is not clear that Zeng will continue as SDPC chief after the NPC, however.)

PRC media have also indicated that the upcoming NPC will not revise the PRC constitution to incorporate Jiang Zemin's "three represents" formulation, which was written into the party constitution at the 16th Party Congress. The fact that this task and other changes to the state constitution might be in the offing was made clear in a long article in the party newspaper, *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*), that reviewed past amendments to the state constitution, which was promulgated in 1982. But according to *Wen wei po*, because of the scale of government reorganization to be addressed at the upcoming NPC, new constitutional changes will be deferred to the 10th NPC's second session, which will convene in 2004.² Beijing followed a similar process in 1998, when the Ninth NPC dealt with a major streamlining of the State Council and the Ninth NPC's second session in 1999 made adjustments to the PRC constitution.

Meanwhile, public appearances of the new party leaders since the 16th Party Congress strongly bear out inferences—based on party rankings—regarding who will succeed to the top state leadership posts at the NPC. If past practice is followed, by these rankings the Politburo Standing Committee's second-ranked member, Wu Bangguo, will succeed Li Peng as NPC chairman, and third-ranked Wen Jiabao will succeed Zhu Rongji as premier. By the same logic, fourth-ranked Jia Qinglin will succeed Li Ruihuan as chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the umbrella organization that unites alternative political parties, professional and civil institutions, religious bodies, trade unions, and other civic institutions behind the purposes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and meets concurrently with the NPC.

That Wen Jiabao will in fact become premier appears confirmed by his work schedule since the November party congress. In December, Wen was identified in *Beijing Review* as a "possible premier candidate," and he has been particularly active in finance and banking affairs, in which he had been heavily involved on the party Secretariat before the party congress. In November, *Wen wei po* identified Wen as "the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of finance," and in

February it reported that Wen had set down a 16-character formulation to guide the anticipated State Council reorganization.³

Similarly, Jia Qinglin's public activities since the party congress indicate that he will emerge as the new head of the CPPCC in March. Jia met with "nonparty" leaders associated with the CPPCC immediately after the 16th Party Congress to encourage their study of the main themes of Jiang Zemin's report to the congress. He has also met repeatedly with religious groups during the transition period and addressed ethnic nationality issues during a late January tour of Beijing city. Jia also presided over a CCP forum marking the lunar new year Spring Festival convened for "nonparty" leaders.

POLITBURO DIVISION OF LABOR

Similarly, public activities of Politburo leaders since the 16th Party Congress have clarified the policy work assignments of the new leadership. Specifically:

- Fifth-ranked Politburo Standing Committee member Zeng Qinghong's public activities confirm that he assists Hu Jintao in party organizational affairs. He replaced Hu Jintao as president of the Central Party School, the party's training institution for high-level party cadres, in early December and presided over graduation ceremonies at the school in late November and in January. Zeng presided over a national conference on party organizational work in mid-December, at which Hu Jintao gave the keynote address. He also hosted a Spring Festival reception for retired party veterans on January 22. In these activities and in his role as executive secretary of the party Secretariat presided over by Hu, Zeng appears to be duplicating the role that Hu himself played in assisting Jiang Zemin in running party affairs from 1992 until the 16th Party Congress.
- Sixth-ranked Politburo Standing Committee member Huang Ju has begun addressing economic affairs—for example, he discussed development issues in the western region during an inspection tour of Gansu Province in mid-January—suggesting that he will assist Wen Jiabao in managing China's economy in the manner in which Li Lanqing aided Zhu Rongji after 1998.

- Eighth-ranked Li Changchun has taken over management of the party ideology and propaganda apparatus, together with Politburo member and party Propaganda Department chief Liu Yunshan. Li now presides over a new central leadership group to promote study of the decisions of the 16th Party Congress. He also gave the keynote address to a national conference of propaganda office directors in early January, and he inspected the offices of *People's Daily* in mid-January.
- Ninth-ranked Politburo Standing Committee member Luo Gan has assumed top responsibility for legal and security affairs, a role previously performed by Wei Jianxing, whom Luo had previously assisted in this policy sector while he was serving on the party Secretariat. Luo, for example, gave the keynote address to a national conference on legal work on December 20.

Taken together, these policy work assignments suggest the priorities of the new Hu leadership. In particular:

- The number of top leaders investing time and energy in law and public-order issues has expanded dramatically—from two in the 1997–2002 period to five at present. These leaders include Politburo Standing Committee members Wu Guanzheng (who as chairman of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission will focus on party corruption) and Luo Gan, Politburo members Zhou Yongkang (as minister of supervision) and Wang Zhaoguo (as head of the umbrella trade union organization), and Secretariat member He Yong.
- Li Changchun's assumption of top responsibility for managing party propaganda elevates that policy portfolio to the Politburo Standing Committee level and, with the concurrent membership of Propaganda Department chief Liu Yunshan on the Politburo, expands the number of top leaders involved in this sector to two. Over the 10 years following the 1992 14th Party Congress, propaganda was managed by Politburo member and concurrently Propaganda Department Director Ding Guangen alone.
- Huang Ju's involvement in economic policy affairs, presumably in conjunction with presumed Premier-designate Wen Jiabao, sustains the arrangement that has existed between Zhu Rongji and Li Lanqing in the outgoing leadership.

The apparent priority given to the law-and-order and ideology-propaganda policy portfolios suggests that the Hu leadership is responding to leadership concerns about party discipline, public security, and social unrest stemming from the economic dislocations of China's adjustment to its WTO concessions, from escalating unemployment amid the continuing drive to reform the state-owned enterprise sector, and from intraparty resistance to transformation of the party membership according to the "three represents" concept.

JIANG ZEMIN AND HU JINTAO

The public profile of Jiang Zemin since the congress has been largely confined to his roles as PRC president and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). He has appeared on numerous occasions greeting foreign dignitaries as PRC president, and he has presided over several events and celebrations sponsored by the CMC. There are no indications in PRC media that Jiang will not cede his post as PRC president to Hu Jintao at the NPC in March, but there continue to be small indications that he will retain his CMC post indefinitely. In particular, Beijing Military Region Commander Zhu Qi declared in an article in the party's top policy journal, *Seeking Truth* (*Qiu shi*):

That Comrade Jiang Zemin continues to serve as chairman of the CMC is an important political choice our party has made, is a political guarantee for the prosperity of the party's cause, for the lasting order and stability of the state, and for promotion of army-building . . . [and] reflects the common desire of the whole party, the whole army, and the people of all nationalities throughout the country.⁴

In media treatment of occasions at which both Jiang and Hu Jintao have been present, Jiang has consistently ranked ahead of Hu. On state and military occasions, this pecking order follows directly from the fact that Hu, as PRC vice president and CMC vice chairman, ranks behind Jiang in formal protocol. At a CMC-sponsored Spring Festival soiree for retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) cadres in Beijing, for example, a front-page photograph in *People's Daily* showed Jiang, followed by Hu and then other CMC leaders, shaking hands with PLA veterans.

There have been no strictly party-sponsored occasions at which both Jiang and Hu have appeared since the 16th Central Committee's First Plenum convened immediately after the party congress to elect the new top leadership. In reporting that event—at which Jiang was reap-

pointed CMC chairman and Hu was appointed party general secretary—*People's Daily* published on its front page's top right quadrant (its most prominent placement) a photograph of Jiang and Hu standing together while receiving party congress delegates. Below this photograph, it published separate pictures of Jiang and Hu side by side, above photographs of each of the remaining eight members of the new Politburo Standing Committee. Nevertheless, an inkling that even in party lineups Jiang precedes Hu was conveyed in a "bulletin" issued by the party General Office and the International Liaison Department thanking foreign leaders for their messages of congratulations to the CCP on behalf of "the Central Committee, CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin, and General Secretary Hu Jintao."⁵

On occasions for which protocol is mixed because of joint sponsorship, a blended lineup has been used in which Jiang comes first. For example, a Spring Festival reception sponsored jointly by the party

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Central Committee and the State Council listed Jiang Zemin first, followed by Hu Jintao. It then listed the retired members of the former Politburo Standing Committee who still retain active state and other posts—Li Peng (NPC chairman), Zhu Rongji (premier), Li Ruihuan (CPPCC chairman), and Li Lanqing (executive vice premier)—and finally the remaining eight members of the new Politburo Standing Committee. Hu Jintao—in his role as party general secretary, not PRC vice president—presided over the event, and Zhu Rongji, as premier, gave the toast. In reporting that event, *People's Daily* placed pictures of Jiang and Hu side by side on its front page,

above a picture of Zhu delivering his toast. This hybrid lineup will likely be discarded once the NPC completes the succession of the Hu leadership into the top state posts.

Jiang has frequently superseded Hu Jintao on the front pages of *People's Daily*, but Hu has received prominent treatment on the front page of the party newspaper. His speech on upright, disciplined, and responsive governance, delivered during a visit on December 5–6 to

Xibaipo, was given prime placement on the front page of the newspaper on January 3, and accounts and photographs of his public activities are routinely given comparable treatment when they are not superseded by Jiang's activities.

THE NEW LEADERSHIP

Despite the transitional nature of the period since the party congress but prior to the NPC, Hu Jintao has been at the center of a concerted effort to portray the new leadership as actively seeking to redress the plight of those left behind in China's rising prosperity, as focused on promoting clean government and rooting out corruption, as working to instill the rule of law, and as becoming more transparent in its workings. The point of departure in these efforts came when Hu led the entire new party Secretariat (minus Zhou Yongkang, who had only just left his post as Sichuan party chief) to the Hebei village of Xibaipo in early December. Xibaipo had been the site of the party headquarters during the last stage of the civil war in 1949. As the party was about to move its headquarters to Beijing in March 1949, the Seventh Central Committee convened its Second Plenum, at which Mao gave a speech that in its closing paragraph enjoined the party leadership, now about to assume power as the government of China, to maintain its tradition of "plain living and hard struggle," to resist the corruption of privilege and status, and to continue to strive to serve the people.

In a long speech concluding the tour of Xibaipo, Hu gave these themes contemporary application. Arguing that the new party leadership faces a comparable challenge as China, in the wake of the 16th Party Congress, embarks on the tasks of building a "moderately well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*) and undertaking the party's transformation according to the three represents, Hu charged his colleagues in the new leadership to adhere to the "two musts" put forth by Mao—to "remain modest, prudent, and free from arrogance and rashness" and to "preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle."

It is inviting to see in Hu's resurrection of these themes an oblique criticism of Jiang's leadership, but this interpretation seems unlikely for several reasons.

- First, Hu was careful in his speech to depict his focus on these traditional themes as building not only on Mao's speech at Xibaipo, but also on comparable past emphasis on these themes

by Deng Xiaoping and then Jiang Zemin (who similarly visited Xibaipo in 1991).

- Second, the occasion was the point of departure for a major and clearly broadly orchestrated media blitz of authoritative commentary, repetition of the “plain living and hard struggle” theme by the rest of the party leadership in Hu’s wake, and other activities, all of which suggest a leadership consensus behind the Hu initiative. Following Hu’s return to Beijing from Xibaipo, a Politburo Standing Committee meeting on December 12 addressed approaches to dealing with the impoverished.⁶ *People’s Daily* has run three commentator articles—the lowest rung of authoritative editorial comment in the party newspaper—on Hu’s themes.⁷ Hu was depicted expressing concern for those left behind in China’s rising prosperity in accounts of his visit to Inner Mongolia in early January and his return to Beijing later that month. Meanwhile, the rest of the new leadership has reportedly been paying similar visits to the rural and urban poor, unemployed state enterprise workers, and impoverished party and PLA veterans and expressing concern over their plight.
- Third, emphasizing these themes comports with the priority that the new leadership attaches to dealing with the rising dislocations and tensions in China’s society as the impact of joining the WTO is increasingly felt and as the leadership presses ahead with state-owned enterprise reform, the three represents-oriented transformation of the party, and other reforms. In addition to the evidence inferred from leadership policy assignments above, see also the analysis by Joseph Fewsmith in this issue of *CLM*.

TRANSPARENCY

The most startling initiative of the Hu leadership since the congress has been the publicity given to meetings of the Politburo and, on one occasion, its Standing Committee. Since the party congress, PRC media have reported on the deliberations of four Politburo meetings:

- On November 16—the day after the 16th Central Committee’s First Plenum—Xinhua News Agency reported that Hu convened the Politburo to inaugurate a nationwide, intraparty

effort to study the main themes and documents of the 16th Party Congress.

- On December 2, Xinhua reported a Politburo meeting concerned with economic policy priorities for the coming year that took place on the eve of the annual Economics Work Meeting.
- On December 26, Xinhua reported that the Politburo discussed agricultural policy on the eve of the annual National Rural Work Conference.
- And on January 28, according to Xinhua, the Politburo met to discuss fighting corruption.

In addition, Xinhua has also provided two accounts of Hu leading Politburo “study group” sessions—one, on December 26, was devoted to studying the PRC constitution as the basis for the rule of law in governance, and the other, on January 28, focused on world economic trends. Even more remarkably, as cited above, Xinhua reported a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee—on December 12 to discuss aiding the poor.

These reports of meetings of the Hu-led Politburo resume a practice begun in the wake of the 1987 13th Party Congress and continued through 1988, when then-party general secretary Zhao Ziyang was working to press ahead with an array of reforms. The practice was discontinued in 1988, following Zhao’s defeat on economic policy at the 13th Central Committee’s Third Plenum and preceding his fall from power in the leadership struggles attending the Tiananmen events in spring 1989. At no other time in PRC history have PRC media provided current reporting on Politburo deliberations as a matter of course. In addition, before the December 12 account, PRC media had never provided current coverage of meetings of the Politburo Standing Committee.

Undoubtedly, Xinhua does not report all meetings of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, nor does it report all the deliberations of those meetings that it does report. Presumably, meetings and discus-

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sions of particularly sensitive issues get no coverage. But, the restoration of an effort at political transparency—a modicum of Chinese glasnost whose sole precedent lies in the controversial Zhao era—is a remarkable initiative on the part of the Hu leadership and may promise further incremental steps at political reform later.

NOTES

1. *Wen wei po*, January 8, January 10, and January 28, 2003, in World News Connection (WNC), FBIS CPP-2003-0108-00017, CPP-2003-0110-000028, and CPP-2003-0128-000026, respectively.

2. Niu Longyun, "The Chinese Constitution Now in Force and Its Three-Time Amendments—China under the Rule of Law," in WNC, FBIS CPP-2003-0121-000064, and *Wen wei po*, December 16, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1216-000039.

3. *Wen wei po*, November 29, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1129-000037, and February 11, 2003, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2003-0211-000030.

4. Zhu Qi, "Actively Promote National Defense and Army-building—On Earnestly Implementing the Spirit of the 16th Party Congress," *Qiu shi*, 2002, no. 23 (December 1).

5. Xinhua News Agency, November 25, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1125-000102.

6. Xinhua News Agency, December 12, 2002, in WNC, FBIS CPP-2002-1212-000147.

7. On December 14 and 15, 2002, and January 24, 2003.