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**CONFLICT BETWEEN WORKERS AND THE PARTY-STATE
IN CHINA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
AUTONOMOUS WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS,
1949-1984**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the four main confrontations between workers and the Party-state in China which have occurred since 1949. These confrontations occurred in the years immediately after liberation (1949-1951); during the Hundred Flowers period (1956-7); during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969), and during the April Fifth and Democracy Wall movements (1976-1981).

Each of these periods is usually regarded as a time when intellectuals and students came into conflict with the Party and expressed dissenting views in protest movements of varying severity and extent. It is not well known that the same four periods were also times of crisis in the relationship between workers and the Party. This study aims to examine workers' activities in each of these four confrontations, analysing the issues about which workers were concerned, identifying the political content of campaigns and demands, and in particular, looking at the evidence of workers' attempts to form their own independent organizations.

Having traced the development of workers' discontent and protest over a period of forty-five years, it becomes apparent that in fact the issues of greatest concern to workers, the issues which have been at the heart of every major confrontation since 1949, have remained essentially the same. However, workers' protests have developed over the years organizationally. The formation of ad hoc strike committees within a single enterprise in the 1950s developed into the organization of large-scale workers' groups which crossed industrial and geographical boundaries during the Cultural Revolution, and then in the early 1980s independent unions were formed modelled on Poland's Solidarity.

This study thus provides the context in which workers' involvement in the Democracy Movement of 1989 can be properly understood, not as an entirely unprecedented event, but as the latest and most severe of a series of crises stemming from the nature of workers' position in China under the CCP.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the six years since the suppression of the Chinese pro-democracy movement, the initial view of most observers - that the involvement of autonomous workers' groups in that movement was merely an epiphenomenon - has shifted somewhat. The publication of accounts such as *Gongren Qilaile*¹ and the possibility of talking to exiled participants has helped to reveal the true significance of workers' activities and organizations in the spring and early summer of 1989. But the seriousness with which the Chinese leadership, right from the beginning, regarded the threat posed by the workers should perhaps have alerted more observers to the significance of workers' activities. Leaders had good reason for their concern, as Anita Chan has recently reminded us:

Whereas most Chinese, above all the younger generation, generally assumed that 1989 was the first time that Chinese workers had turned upon the Party in protest, the Party elite was painfully aware that this in fact was the fifth time that a portion of the Chinese working class (at times led by the official trade unions) had asserted itself politically.²

In view of this statement that politically-charged confrontations between workers and the Party had in fact occurred before, the question arises as to whether workers'

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- 1 *Gongren Qilaile* (The Workers Have Risen), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Trade Union Education Centre, 1990; English edition (pub. Asia Monitor Resource Centre Ltd.) *A Moment of Truth*.
 - 2 Anita Chan, "Revolution or Corporatism? Workers and Trade Unions in Post-Mao China", *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 29 (Jan. 1993), 32.

activities in 1989 were really unprecedented, as is often claimed.

In the light of the recent re-assessment of the significance of workers' Democracy Movement activities, it now seems appropriate to look back at the four previous instances of workers' protest mentioned by Anita Chan, and to examine them afresh to find out whether or not they offer any sort of precedent for the events of 1989. In particular, this study will look for pre-1989 precedents for the formation of independent workers' organizations. It is of course possible that the circumstances of workers' political activities in 1989 were unique, since the progress of the economic reforms had by then created a China quite different in some respects to the one which existed before 1978. But given that the political significance of the Workers' Autonomous Federations has now been recognized, there is also the possibility that in the past, outside observers were too easily convinced by the Chinese authorities' line that the vast majority of workers were loyal and politically reliable, that only a small minority had anything to do with anti-Party protests, and that where workers had become involved in protests, their motives and grievances were selfish and narrowly economic, and represented opportunistic demands rather than any deep-seated disagreement with the policies or line of the regime.

Part of the problem in weighing the arguments regarding workers' relationship with the Party is that the divisions between different groups of workers have not always been recognized (with the partial exception of the Cultural Revolution, where research has revealed the importance of socio-economic background and status in determining factional allegiance). However, the common picture of Chinese workers as basically supporting the Party, and even intervening on its behalf against other groups involved in anti-Party protest, is not at all convincing when applied to the whole range of workers in all types of enterprise across the country. It

only holds true to any extent, and even then not entirely, when applied to the relatively privileged group of permanent workers employed in the largest state enterprises, a minority of the industrial workforce as a whole. The work of Elizabeth Perry and Francois Gipouloux on the Hundred Flowers is very welcome in this respect, since it shifts attention to disadvantaged groups within the workforce who have been prepared to confront the Party and to take their protests onto the streets.

It is not the claim of this study that all workers, or even a majority of them, have regularly been involved in confrontations with Party-state authorities which had a political aspect to them. But it is my contention that conflict, often originating from economic grievances, but quickly developing into a political dispute as a result of the dominance of the Party within enterprises, has been a far more common feature of industrial life in China than is generally recognized. This background of conflict and discontent within enterprises provides the context in which workers' involvement in movements such as the Hundred Flowers, the Cultural Revolution, April Fifth and Democracy Wall can be properly understood. If workers' activities at these times had merely represented economically-motivated opportunism, it is hard to see why the regime should have been greatly concerned about them. But in fact, protesting workers have consistently been treated more harshly than any other social group in the repression of such protest movements, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that the Party regards workers' involvement as its cue to bring protests to an end by whatever means necessary. This has been the case in particular since the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, but even before this spectre of the working-class overthrow of a ruling Communist Party began to haunt the socialist world, the CCP on several occasions demonstrated that workers' protests were more disturbing to it and constituted a more serious problem than did student or intellectual activities.

This study, then, is mainly concerned with the four earlier crises in the always strained relationship between the Chinese working class and its self-proclaimed vanguard, the CCP. These occurred in the early post-liberation period (1949-1952); during the Hundred Flowers movement (1956-7); during the Cultural Revolution; and in the late 1970s and early 1980s, beginning with the Tian'anmen Incident of 1976 and continuing through the subsequent Democracy Wall Movement. We will examine the attitudes and activities of workers in each of these confrontations with the authorities, and use this as the basis for a re-examination of the history of the working class in China under CCP rule, focusing mainly on the city of Guangzhou (Canton).

Secondary sources relevant to this study can be divided into three broad groups: those which relate to the movements mentioned above; those which focus on the Chinese working class since 1949; and those which deal with the position of workers under socialist rule in countries other than China. Starting with the first group, we find that most accounts of the Hundred Flowers movement, the Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Wall movement portray these as being primarily intellectual and/or student movements, with any involvement on the part of workers being of secondary importance. This is, of course, the attitude taken by many in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 Democracy Movement, hence the need for a critical re-examination of this assessment now.

Not only has workers' involvement in these movements been given little attention, but in fact, in many cases workers only appear in large numbers in these accounts after the backlash has already begun, when they are mobilized by the Party or the official unions to criticize and attack the original protestors; this is particularly true when the Hundred Flowers movement and the early stages of the Cultural Revolution are discussed. A notable exception to this tendency, as mentioned above, is François Gipouloux's study of

the confrontation between workers and the Party which developed towards the end of the First Five-Year Plan, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*. The conclusions of this study are in keeping with my own findings (discussed in section two) that far from industrial unrest and protests by workers being an episode in the Hundred Flowers movement, the reverse may be closer to the truth.

But generally speaking, the significance of workers' involvement in these movements has been unduly neglected. Workers' initial reluctance to become active in such movements may be taken as a sign of satisfaction with the status quo rather than caution in the face of the serious risks involved, while the Chinese leadership's attribution of selfish and narrowly economic motives to protesting workers is too often accepted at face value. Why the Chinese leadership should be intent on 'down-playing and even obliterating any collective memory'³ of its confrontations with workers is not difficult to understand: desirable though the support of intellectuals and students might be, it is on its claim to be the vanguard of the most advanced class, the working class, that the legitimacy of the CCP regime rests. It is less obvious why outside observers should thus far have devoted relatively little attention to workers in this context, since sources dealing with workers are for the most part no less accessible than those relating to other groups. However, it is hoped that this study will go some way towards redressing the balance and, in focusing exclusively on the role of workers, will shed some new light on the movements concerned.

The second group of sources includes studies of various aspects of the official trade unions in China (Lee Lai To, Paul Harper), as well as work on industrial organization, enterprise management, and industrial democracy (Andrew Walder, Steven Andors, Bill Brugger, Charles Bettelheim,

3 Ibid., 32.

Martin Lockett). The latter topic is particularly important for our purposes, as the absence of democracy and of opportunities to participate in management has been a perennial cause of complaint amongst Chinese workers, as well as being one of the more obviously political causes of disputes at the enterprise level. The legitimacy of workers' complaints has been acknowledged by the Party, which has made its most strenuous efforts to establish satisfactory representative institutions for workers at precisely those moments when worker discontent has reached a peak (1950, 1956-7, 1967, 1980). Deborah Kaple has identified the contradiction between the centralized, Stalinist system of industrial organization and management which the Chinese adopted after 1949, and the Chinese Communists' own earlier experiences of more democratic management, pointing out that the democratic institutions the CCP set up within factories were never going to be able to play their proper role in the rigidly hierarchical system of one-man management, adopted from the Soviet Union, which will be discussed in more detail in section one.⁴ Nevertheless, the Party continued to pay lip-service to the importance of democracy in factories, and it is possible that this very insistence on its desirability helped to inflame workers' resentment when reality failed to match rhetoric.

Although the works of Andors, Brugger, Bettelheim and Lockett⁵ deal with the development of various structures for workers' participation in management at some length, they give

4 Kaple, *Dream of a red factory*, .

5 Andors, *China's industrial revolution: Politics, planning and management, 1949 to the present*; Bettelheim, *The Cultural Revolution and industrial organization in China*; Brugger, *Democracy and organization in the Chinese industrial enterprise, 1949-1953*; Lockett, *Cultural Revolution and industrial organization in a Chinese enterprise: the Beijing General Knitwear Mill, 1966-81*, and "Enterprise management - moves towards democracy?", in Feuchtwang and Hussain (eds.), *The Chinese economic reforms*.

very little indication of the role which workers' own demands and pressures from below have played in pushing the authorities towards these more democratic forms of management. Similarly, in describing the limitations and ultimate failure of all such structures or institutions, little attention is given to the possible reactions of disappointed workers, leaving the impression that when their aspirations have been thwarted, workers tend simply to accept the situation, whereas in fact, as leaders of the official trade unions in China have been aware since at least 1957, in certain circumstances workers with a grievance and no legitimate official channel for resolving it will resort to illegitimate methods, such as organizing themselves independently or taking unofficial industrial action. So the overall picture is one of workers as the passive recipients of top-down reforms, not as active proponents of changes in the direction of greater democracy.

There are similar problems with the picture of relations in a Chinese industrial enterprise which emerges from Andrew Walder's *Communist Neotraditionalism*. In emphasizing the successful working of the networks of patron-client relationships and organized dependency which the Party, 'under normal circumstances'⁶, can use to control workers in the enterprise, and in particular to prevent them from taking any sort of organized collective action outside official auspices, this study tends to go along with the official line that cases of this sort of action are extremely rare among Chinese workers, which as we will see in the following sections is not the case. In contrasting these Party methods with more overt forms of repression, Walder observes that

A state or elite which must use a large amount of force to repress emerging or ongoing collective action exercises less effective control than a state or elite which is able regularly to prevent

6 *Communist Neotraditionalism*, 11.

organized group action in the first place. The most brutal and violent regimes are not necessarily the most effective at imposing political control; their brutality and violence is often a mark of a poorly organized and ineffective effort to stem collective action.⁷

It is generally agreed that in the aftermath of the 1989 pro-democracy protests it was workers who suffered the harshest and most violent repression, and in fact this is true of the Party's reaction to workers' involvement in earlier protest movements as well. As well as testifying to the Party's perception that independent action by workers poses the most serious threat to its rule, this would also seem to indicate that the Party has been much less successful at controlling workers, and conversely that workers have been a great deal more active on their own behalf, than Walder supposes.

As has been pointed out elsewhere, Walder's work to a great extent focuses on the relatively privileged group of permanent workers in large-scale state enterprises, and this means that his conclusions may not hold good for other groups. Some of the apparent disagreement about workers' political awareness and attitudes can be traced to the fact that different observers are talking about different groups within the working class, so clearly it is important to identify where possible which workers are under discussion. However, Walder's focus on the penetration of Party control right down to the workshop level within the enterprise is relevant to this study, since it illustrates the point that, with the official unions and enterprise management also ultimately deferring to Party authority, disputes even at this low level tend quickly to develop into a confrontation between workers and the Party.

7 Ibid., 18-19.

As for the official trade unions, since membership among Chinese workers is the norm, although it is not actually compulsory, it might be assumed that an account of conflicts between the official unions and the Party would subsume any discussion of conflicts between workers and the Party. But it becomes clear on the most cursory reading of, for example, letters from workers in the Chinese press during the 1956-7 period, that in most cases the official unions were definitely part of the problem as far as workers were concerned. It was in fact not at all unusual, as sections one and two will show, for enterprise unions to side with management against the workers when disputes arose, and even when unions were inclined to support their members, they usually lacked the power to do so in any effective way. More will be said about the precise role of the unions later; for now it will suffice to note that it is important, wherever possible, to distinguish between the attitudes and interests of workers themselves and those of their official representatives, since they by no means always coincide. Consequently, while accounts of confrontations between the official unions and the Party may be of interest to us particularly at those moments where the unions sided with the workers, e.g. 1951, all too often these accounts relegate workers themselves to a minor role. As with discussions of management reforms and changes in industrial organizations, the active role of workers in pushing for preferred options is largely left out of many of these accounts.

By drawing on the above two groups of sources it is possible to piece together a general account of how the position of workers in the enterprise and in wider society has developed in China since 1949. However, this tends to be a distorted account in which workers' independent activities - industrial action or unrest not backed by the official unions, or the formation of independent organizations of varying degrees of formality, up to and including independent unions - are consistently down-played or even ignored. There is an

over-emphasis on higher-level, institutional conflicts between the official trade union organization and the Party, concentrating on the unions' periodic attempts to gain greater autonomy from the Party, with relatively little attention given to union members' own aspirations and demands and the ways in which these might influence the actions of higher-level union leadership.

In addition, the political content of workers' protests is given less prominence than economic causes of disputes, and workers' actions under official mobilization (such as organized criticism of intellectuals during the anti-rightist campaign in 1957, or the entry of worker-picket teams into universities and schools to restore order during the Cultural Revolution) tend to be regarded as more reliable indicators of working-class opinion (and support for the Party) than actions undertaken independently by workers on their own initiative, often at considerable personal risk. Thus workers emerge as a rather passive section of society which basically supports the Party, and which is only occasionally moved to protest in defence of its economic privileges when a relatively safe opportunity to do so appears; this might take the form of an intellectual- or student-led protest movement, or a shift in the attitude towards workers on the part of either the Party or the official unions.

What is missing from such an account, above all, is any sense of workers as active political players in their own right, responding to developments in their enterprises and in wider society not merely in accordance with their own narrow economic interests, but in the light of their political beliefs and aspirations; workers who, having undergone many hours of education as to their leading role in the state as well as in the factory, in which their status as management's political equals has been stressed, are prepared to defend their rights and protest against management authoritarianism and cadre privilege, in the first instance through officially

sanctioned channels, such as the trade union or the workers' congress, but later, when these prove inadequate, by methods such as independent organization and strike action which, if not actually illegal, certainly lack official approval.

Since little evidence for this sort of portrayal of Chinese workers is offered in most existing accounts, is it safe to assume that their role in the major political movements in contemporary China has indeed been a minor one, and that those workers whose protests have become visible are an unrepresentative minority? Here it may be useful to refer to the third group of relevant secondary sources, studies of workers in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. There are of course important differences between the PRC and these countries, but it would be unreasonable to exclude these sources from consideration altogether for that reason. We are, after all, considering workers' experiences under socialist rule and socialist management, and the fact of the various regimes' coming to power under different circumstances and developing in different directions should not be allowed to obscure the basic similarity in workers' situations. The Chinese leadership itself has always been keenly aware of possible parallels between events in Eastern Europe and in China, as will be shown in section two when we see how knowledge of the uprisings in Poland and Hungary in 1956 influenced the policies of the Hundred Flowers period in China, and in particular attitudes towards workers. In more recent years it is the example of Solidarity in Poland which seems to have preoccupied the Chinese authorities and informed their responses to workers' independent activities, especially attempts to form independent unions⁸, as we shall see in

8 See Jeanne Wilson, "'The Polish Lesson' - China and Poland 1980-1990", *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23, 3-4 (1990). The 'Solidarity-phobia' of the CCP is noted by many commentators as a factor in the rapid suppression of the Workers' Autonomous Federations in 1989.

section four.

From studies of workers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union dealing with the issues which concern us in China (the functioning of official trade unions; participation, democracy and workers' councils; workers' involvement in popular protest movements; the causes and development of disputes; the question of independent unions), a consensus seems to emerge that there are certain basic problems inherent in the position of workers in a socialist state which are bound to emerge sooner or later.⁹ In general terms, the dilemma faced by workers in an avowedly socialist system is as follows. A ruling Communist Party usually defines itself as the vanguard of the working class, an elite organization of the most advanced elements of that class. But this does not mean that the Party represents the interests of the working class as opposed to those of other groups in society; as the highest national authority, it must act in the best interests of the country as a whole. It is an article of faith that the long-term interests of the working class are identical with those of the Party-state, but it is accepted that in the short term there may be discrepancies, and that in any case, workers need their own organization to protect their specific rights and interests against any violations of policy or law which enterprise management might commit. So official trade unions are organized, under the leadership of the Party.

All such trade unions are organized in accordance with the 'dual function' Soviet model, i.e. they have

9 Works under consideration here include Triska and Gati (eds.), *Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, in particular the chapters by Walter D Connor, J M Montias, Alex Pravda and Daniel Nelson; Blair Ruble, *Soviet Trade Unions*; Adolf Sturmthal, *Workers' Councils - A study of workplace organization on both sides of the Iron Curtain*; Paul E Zinner (ed.), *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe - A selection of documents on events in Poland and Hungary, February-November 1956*.

responsibilities towards management and the Party with regard to mobilizing workers for production as well as being responsible for protecting the rights and interests of their members, rather than being solely the representatives of workers and (usually) the adversaries of management, as has been more common outside the socialist world. They are commonly described as a 'transmission belt', passing on the Party's policies and instructions to the workers and also communicating the opinions and problems of the workers to the Party. Unions are also to act as 'schools of communism', responsible for ideological as well as technical and cultural education of workers. An additional feature intended to distinguish socialist enterprises from capitalist ones is their system of democratic management, involving workers' participation in management through either representation on managing bodies or the election of a workers' council or congress with specific rights and powers in the enterprise. Although the division of labour demanded by modern, large-scale industry means that workers mainly engage in physical labour while management mainly occupies itself with mental labour, this does not imply any inequality of social or political status; the position of workers in a socialist enterprise is fundamentally different from that of capitalist wage-labourers, as the means of production are owned not by a private individual but by the state, which is led by the working class.

That, then, is the theory. But in practice, conflicts quickly begin to emerge. A study of Eastern European and Soviet sources does not reveal any case where the official unions were able to perform their dual functions satisfactorily for any length of time; many union activists in China in the mid-1950s complained that their task was simply impossible, and they may well have been correct. What generally happens is that the unions have to side either with the Party and management or with the workers. If they support the workers, they lay themselves open to Party accusations of

economism or syndicalism¹⁰; if they side with management and the Party, they risk losing the trust and allegiance of workers who come to regard them as little better than a tool of management or an arm of the state. They are in any case much less powerful than either the enterprise Party organization or its management, and therefore unable to offer much effective support to workers. Workers' councils (the workers' representative conference or workers' congress in China) fare little better, as they tend to require the goodwill and active cooperation of senior management, especially the factory director, to be able to function as intended. In fact, far from welcoming and supporting it, managers generally regard workers' participation in management as a time-consuming and unnecessary burden, and rank-and-file workers seem to have particular difficulty in using this sort of organ to bring their influence to bear on workplace decision-making.¹¹

Given that these problems with official trade unions and workers' representative bodies seem to be universal in socialist states, it becomes apparent that workers can actually find themselves in a weaker position vis-à-vis managerial and political authorities in socialist enterprises than they would in capitalist ones. They are urged, or compelled, to give up such traditional methods of defending their interests as strikes, and indeed are assured that any such action would be pointless since they, as the leading class in society, would only be striking against themselves. Yet the democratic socialist management systems which are

10 'Economism' denotes an over-emphasis on securing material benefits for workers in excess of what can be afforded through improved productivity, at the expense both of other social groups and the state as a whole. Syndicalism indicates an attempt by the unions to supplant the Party and establish themselves as the highest organization of the working class.

11 In addition to Triska and Gati and Sturmthal, see also Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, especially chapters 4 and 5.

supposed to render this type of action unnecessary, and which are an essential foundation for workers' new status as the masters of the state and of the enterprise, seem to be fatally flawed. And as we shall see when we examine events in China in more detail, whereas workers' relationships with capitalist employers before 1949 had at least been unambiguously antagonistic, the shift to state ownership could leave workers in a very difficult position, where legitimate disagreements with enterprise management could be presented by the latter as an attack on the authority of the state organization which they represented, tantamount to an attempt to 'overthrow the leadership'.

The central contradiction faced by workers in socialist enterprises is thus that while the authorities insist that workers are the masters of the enterprise and stress the ownership of the means of production as the decisive factor, in reality workers often find that they are virtually powerless to exercise any control over their working lives or any influence over the officials who are supposed to be their political equals. One writer has described the likely result of this contradiction between rhetoric and reality thus:

No matter what political apathy or cynicism may prevail, the official values of the regime are a standing incitement to trouble. A regime basing its legitimacy on the power, if not the dictatorship, of the working class, and a regime which spreads the classics of Marxism-Leninism through its educational and propaganda work, is bound to face sharp, persistent and spontaneous tests of the reality versus the stated norms ... the official ideology makes claims on behalf of the industrial workers which the day to day reality contradicts.¹²

12 Bogdan Denitch, "Yugoslav Exceptionalism", in *ibid.*, 254.

From the above sources it is clear that conflict between workers and the authorities in a socialist enterprise tends to become a regular feature of industrial life, since the mechanisms which are meant to avert open confrontation between workers and the enterprise leadership do not function as intended. One point which greatly exercises writers on industrial disputes and conflicts under socialism is the extent to which such disputes have political content and significance. A view commonly expressed in writings on workers in Eastern Europe is that conflicts between the working class, 'the professed mainstay of the political order in communist polities'¹³ and its 'erstwhile vanguard'¹⁴ are inherently political; as was indicated earlier, the opposition of even a section of the working class to a ruling Communist Party is uniquely damaging to that Party's legitimacy.

At first glance, specific disputes often seem to be based on purely economic grievances: the Polish strikes of 1970, for example, were sparked by meat price increases, and Solidarity was later formed as a result of a similar outcry over price increases. But closer examination of a dispute as it develops usually reveals much more profound concerns on the part of workers which centre on problems of social and political inequality. To return to the Polish example, the first demand of workers in the Szczecin shipyards in 1970 was not for the rescinding of the meat price increase, but for the abolition of the official unions in favour of independent unions organized by the workers themselves, and for rectification of the situation in which management and the state industrial bureaucracy (the ones who took decisions regarding the price of meat, wage levels and other questions of great importance to workers) were inflated in numbers, paid far too much in relation to workers, and provided with disproportionate

13 Triska and Gati, 'Introduction', *Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, xi.

14 Ibid., xvi.

material benefits and other privileges.¹⁵

In other words, the problems were that social inequalities existed between workers on the one hand and managers and officials on the other, while workers lacked the political power to remedy these inequalities as their official unions and structures for participation in management were ineffective. This is why demands for the formation of independent unions to protect workers' interests are such a common feature of the latter stages of such disputes, and why some workers eventually develop the view that Party and management officials constitute a new ruling class¹⁶, a class which does not and cannot represent the interests of workers since it is mainly concerned with perpetuating its own powerful and privileged position. Thus we see how a dispute triggered by a specific economic grievance can rapidly escalate into a serious political conflict; examples of this progression in China can be found in reports of industrial unrest during the Hundred Flowers period.

We now have two rather different portrayals of how workers fare under socialist government and management: one, drawn from studies of China, which depicts Chinese workers as basically loyal supporters of the Party who are politically passive and whose participation in popular protest movements is marginal; and the other, based on research on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which strongly suggests that sharp, persistent and escalating conflict between the working class on one side and management and the Party on the other is an inevitable product of the state socialist industrial system, and that workers will repeatedly be driven to take independent collective action including the formation of their own organizations. That the former portrayal is just

15 J M Montias, "Observations on strikes, riots, and other disturbances", Triska and Gati (eds.), *Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, 181.

16 Ibid., 182.

now beginning to be revised in favour of the latter is shown by Anita Chan's remarks in the article quoted above, and by other reassessments of the significance of the Workers' Autonomous Federations formed in 1989, and of workers' involvement in the Hundred Flowers movement.¹⁷ But in my view there is still a need to return to Chinese sources as the basis for a complete reappraisal of the experience of workers in China's cities since 1949.

This study is intended as such a reappraisal, focusing on workers themselves, as opposed to the official trade unions, and, bearing in mind the findings of studies of workers in other socialist countries, examining workers' responses to Party policies, their degree of satisfaction with the functioning of the official unions and the various bodies set up to represent them in the enterprise, the development of their relationship with political and managerial authorities, and the underlying causes, nature and possible political significance of any conflicts or disputes which might arise. Tracing the development of the four major crises in workers' relationship with the CCP regime up to 1984 will also lead to a reassessment of the significance of workers' involvement in the wider movements, such as the Hundred Flowers movement or the Cultural Revolution, with which these crises coincided. It is hoped that a more detailed picture of workers' attitudes and concerns, particularly in the very early stages of each of the periods of confrontation, will provide insights into the underlying causes of these confrontations and a fuller and more intelligible account of their development.

One question which will be raised is whether or not sufficiently copious and reliable material is available to permit this sort of exercise, given that the official Chinese press has an explicit propaganda function, and that workers are on the whole less likely to publish their views in the

17 In addition to Gipouloux's work mentioned earlier, a book by Anita Chan is also forthcoming.

form of articles or books than are Party leaders or intellectuals. The answer is a qualified yes, qualified both because a certain amount of caution is needed in drawing conclusions from material which has been published for a particular political purpose, and because the sort of material we require may not be available in abundance from each of the periods under consideration. The earliest period, the years immediately following liberation in 1949, is, as might be expected, the most problematic in terms of availability of sources, but even here enough material can be found to make the exercise worthwhile, and given that illuminating precedents can be found in this period for many of the conflicts which were to come to the fore later in the 1950s during the Hundred Flowers movement, it would be a mistake to overlook it altogether because of occasional gaps in the available material.

It should be borne in mind that although it is generally true that all organs of the Chinese press are subject to official control, the strictness with which this control is or can be applied varies enormously according to the type of publication concerned and the atmosphere and policies of the time. Thus provincial or local newspapers such as the *Nanfang Ribao* or the *Guangzhou Ribao* may not always follow the Party line as expounded by the national leadership in Beijing in the editorial columns of the *Renmin Ribao*, the CCP's main organ. At times when greater openness and frank criticism of Party shortcomings are being encouraged, as happened during the Hundred Flowers movement, such newspapers may even be fairly outspoken: in section two we will be referring to a series of investigative articles published by the *Nanfang Ribao* in 1956 which exposed both the deplorable living and working conditions of many Guangzhou workers and the indifference of officials to this situation. Local newspapers are also more likely to publish letters and queries from readers, including workers, as was the case with the *Guangzhou Ribao* in 1957, when a letter from Guangzhou worker Wang Cai provoked such a

flood of replies from other workers that they constituted a regular column in the paper for two months. There is also the point, obvious but sometimes overlooked, that although the leadership may from time to time attempt to rewrite history in the light of major policy changes, these attempts do not extend to recalling and destroying all evidence of heterodox points of view or of the sometimes lively debates which go on before a question of policy or ideology is definitively settled by the top leadership.

Since we are focusing on workers, there is also the extensive labour movement press to draw upon. These newspapers and periodicals, too, do not necessarily always stick to the Party line, and although they are periodically brought back into line when they are judged to have gone too far, they do provide a great deal of valuable material, especially in the form of letters and articles written by workers themselves. Both daily newspapers and periodicals publish trade union reports and surveys which, although intended for wide dissemination and therefore not as frank as purely internal documents, do provide evidence of often serious problems in union work and in workers' lives, and frequently include verbatim workers' criticisms of unions, management or the Party to back up the points they make.

For the later, post-Mao period, we will also be referring to a very limited amount of official union material intended for internal circulation only, which is a useful complement to the more widely available sources. And while for the period from 1949 until the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 this research is based mainly on the sorts of official publications described above, for the Cultural Revolution itself and the subsequent Democracy Wall movement, we also have the benefit of unofficial publications produced by participants in the movements themselves, including many workers, which provide an invaluable alternative view of events as well as a detailed exposition of participants'

views. Finally, outside monitoring of the Chinese press¹⁸ can sometimes provide details of sensitive events such as strikes or demonstrations which the main official newspapers refer to euphemistically or not at all. Monitoring of local or regional radio broadcasts is particularly useful in this respect; perhaps because of the nature of the medium, radio stations seem prepared to report such events more frankly than is possible in the printed media, where the existence of a permanent and checkable record of what has been said may be an inhibiting factor.

The proximity of Guangzhou to Hong Kong is an advantage in this respect, as both official and unofficial sources relating to the city, not to mention exiled participants in the movements which concern us, tend to find their way out of the PRC via Hong Kong, and are thus more readily available than is the case for many other parts of China. However, this is not the only reason for choosing to focus on the city. It is because this study will cover a fairly long period of time that it is helpful to concentrate on a limited geographical area. Despite its reputation as more of a commercial, consumer city than an industrial, producer one, it will be seen from the following sections that the workers of Guangzhou have been as heavily involved in many of the events with which this study is concerned as those of any other urban centre. Guangzhou workers were highly critical of Party policies and the new official unions in 1950; they took industrial action, often in large numbers, during 1956-7, and filled the columns of local newspapers with detailed critiques of the leadership of their enterprises; their groups were involved in the violent confrontations of the Cultural Revolution, and the

18 I refer here to sources such as the *Survey of World Broadcasts* (SWB), the *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS), *Survey of China Mainland Press* (SCMP), *Extracts From China Mainland Magazines* (ECMM), *Survey of China Mainland Magazines* (SCMM), *Current Background* (CB), *Union Research Service* (URS), *News from Chinese Regional/Provincial Radio Stations* (NCRRS/NCPRS).

city was the site of the celebrated 'Li Yizhe' big-character poster in 1974; during the Democracy Wall movement, unofficial publications written by and for workers flourished in the city.

Where Guangzhou does differ from some other modern Chinese industrial centres, the differences can actually make it a more rewarding object of study than it would otherwise be. The city was an important industrial and commercial centre in China before the Communist victory in 1949, and moreover was a flourishing centre of the Chinese labour movement in its early years (1917-1927); the labour movement continued as far as was possible underground after 1927, and reemerged at the end of the Anti-Japanese War to challenge the faltering Guomindang regime with increasing militancy. Thus in 1949 the existing workforce in Guangzhou brought with it not only high expectations of Communist policies, fuelled by what they had heard of earlier liberated areas, but also a certain history or tradition of militant action, which, as we shall see in section one, posed problems for the new regime as it attempted to win the workers over to its policy of temporary moderation. A related point is that far more capitalists and other staff from private enterprises were persuaded to stay on in the city after 1949 and keep their enterprises open than was the case in the earlier liberated areas. A fairly large private industrial sector therefore continued to exist for up to seven years, affording us an opportunity to compare the experiences of workers in private, state, and joint state-private enterprises under a socialist government, and to note the conclusions drawn from these same comparisons by the workers themselves as to the problems arising from the transition from private to state management.

In conclusion, the intention of this study is to draw on all of the above primary and secondary sources in constructing a detailed account of how the position of Chinese workers in

the workplace and beyond has developed over the four decades since the founding of the PRC. This account will provide the context, which has hitherto been missing, in which the first four major confrontations between workers and the CCP can be understood not as aberrations, but as the most serious manifestations of fundamental contradictions which have always been present in their relationship. Looked at in isolation, and without detailed knowledge of the background in terms of workers' attitudes, living and working conditions, and their position within the socialist enterprise, it is possible to see why the view has gained ground that workers' activities in each case have been of only marginal importance. Yet if we consider these four 'aberrations' together, equipped both with our knowledge of Chinese workers' lives and with some understanding of workers' experiences in other socialist states, then a more accurate depiction of Chinese workers' experience of, and responses to, CCP rule will emerge. It is only by taking into account all four of the crises we have identified in workers' relations with the CCP that we can see both the similarities between them and the ways in which they have become progressively more acute and harder to resolve with each recurrence. We can also see how workers have progressed, gaining in organizational and political confidence through their experiences in these periodic confrontations.

For example, we will see how over the years the official trade unions were first criticized, then rejected in favour of independent, though informal and small-scale, organizations, and then ceased to exist altogether for much of the Cultural Revolution and the years up to 1976, as workers organized themselves into Red Guard and other groups. This experience of larger-scale collective political activity meant that after the Cultural Revolution, workers were quick to organize independent trade unions during the unrest surrounding the Democracy Wall movement, with some making explicit reference to similar movements in Eastern Europe by appropriating the 'Solidarity' title. We will also see how criticism of cadres'

bureaucratist and undemocratic attitudes after liberation gave rise during the Hundred Flowers period and after to the idea that the political power of the bureaucracy over workers might lead it to develop into a new class. This serious political division between the workers and their leaders meant that in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, with workers' attitudes towards authority radically altered by their experiences, the confrontation between workers and the Party was expressed in terms of class conflict, i.e. a conflict between the workers and the new ruling class.

This study will show that conflict between Chinese workers and the leadership of their enterprises has been a much more common feature of industrial life in China than is generally realized, and, in investigating the underlying problems of social and political inequality in the workplace (which seem to be of far greater significance in motivating workers to protest, and eventually to organize themselves, than the purely economic grievances usually stressed in official accounts), will demonstrate the wider political implications of apparently limited industrial disputes. It will pay particular attention to Chinese workers' attempts to organize themselves outside Party control, a subject given renewed importance by the widespread formation (and suppression) of Workers' Autonomous Federations in many Chinese cities in 1989. This fifth confrontation with workers, regarded by many at the time and since as of slight importance, a sideshow to the main student demonstrations, will thus be seen in its proper context, not as an unprecedented action on the part of Chinese workers, but as the latest, and most serious, in a series of crises in workers' troubled relationship with the CCP regime.

SECTION ONE

GUANGZHOU: LIBERATION AND REFORM

The first major confrontation between the CCP and Chinese workers began to develop immediately after the Communist victory in 1949. The newly-organized official trade unions played an important part in it, so much so that accounts of the period often focus exclusively on the unions' struggle for greater autonomy from the Party at this time, a struggle which culminated in the removal of the veteran CCP leader Li Lisan as Chair of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) in early 1952. This concentration on the higher levels of the union hierarchy has tended to obscure the activities of workers themselves at the grassroots level, and may perhaps explain why 'the incident went down in popular memory as simply a power struggle among the Party's top leaders.'¹ In fact, as we shall see in this section, the confrontation had its roots in the conflict between workers' expectations of their new role and status after liberation and the Party's more moderate policies towards the takeover of industry, particularly in later liberated cities such as Guangzhou.

Many elements of the ongoing conflict between workers and Party authorities in the early 1950s will become familiar as we examine later crises in this problematic relationship. They include the difficulties faced by basic-level trade unions in carrying out their dual functions, presented with the dilemma of either alienating their own members with their obedience to Party and managerial authorities in the enterprise, or supporting the workers and risking accusations

1 Chan, 'Revolution or corporatism?', 33.

of economism, syndicalism, and attempting to usurp Party leadership over the working class. We will see how, beginning in late 1949, the new official unions shifted between these two positions in response to conflicting pressures from the workers below them and the Party above, apparently unable to find any viable 'middle way', and ultimately succumbed to absolute dominance by the Party at the Seventh ACFTU Congress in May 1953, thus incurring the disappointment, even disgust, of many workers, who complained that the unions had 'lost their guts' after the Congress.²

Another familiar feature making its first appearance in this period is the promotion of management democratization in response to workers' demands for a greater say in the running of their enterprises, both state and private. The marked similarity between the problems encountered in the establishment and operation of various workers' representative bodies at this early stage, and again in 1956-7 and the early 1980s, supports the view that there are fundamental flaws in such organizations which ultimately undermine them all. Deborah Kaple's work has suggested that the Chinese attempted in the early post-liberation period to implement an idealized, and correspondingly harsh, version of the Stalinist industrial organization and management practices then prevalent in the Soviet Union, and that the attempt to graft onto this provisions for democratic management was always doomed.³ This is a persuasive view, since one so often has the impression that workers and grass-roots cadres alike in this period are struggling with systems which fundamentally do not work.

Workers' criticisms of cadres, whether union, administrative or Party, and indeed the self-criticisms of

2 Gongren Ribao 21.5.57, 'What is the fundamental cause behind the trade union work "crisis"?', in SCMP 1551, 19.

3 See Kaple, *Dream of a red factory: The legacy of High Stalinism in China*, 58-69.

these same officials, also return time after time to what seem to be the perennial problems in the attitudes and workstyle of leadership cadres: bureaucratism, isolation from the masses, a preference for coercive or commandist methods, failure to trust in the workers, arrogance and high-handedness, formalism, and a lack of democracy within enterprises and in the trade unions. In the early post-liberation period many such problems might be attributed to the difficult economic situation, the inexperience of large numbers of cadres, or workers' 'unduly high' 'expectations of the new regime, were it not for the fact of their repeated recurrence during later confrontations between Party and workers. It is this which gives them added significance in the years under consideration in this chapter.

In order to understand why many workers, especially in later liberated areas, found the Party's moderate policies on the takeover of industry difficult to accept, we must first look at workers' earlier experiences of both economic and political struggle and how these shaped their attitudes and expectations of Communist rule. It has been noted in the introduction to this study that Guangzhou before 1949 was already a major industrial and commercial centre, and that the existing workforce brought with it into the new era a certain history of labour movement activity. Reporting the liberation of Guangzhou two days after the event on October 16 1949, the *Gongren Ribao* reminded readers of the 'glorious tradition' of the labour movement in the city during the Republican period, describing Guangzhou as 'a hotbed of the 1925-27 revolution', and recalling workers' role in the Guangzhou uprising and the establishment of the short-lived Guangzhou Commune, 'the first worker-peasant-soldier revolutionary regime in China', in December 1927.⁵

4 Paul Harper, 'The Party and the Unions in Communist China', *China Quarterly* 37 (Jan-Mar.1969), 91.

5 *Gongren Ribao* 16.10.49, 1.

In fact the labour movement in Guangzhou has an even longer history, dating back to the activities of the anarchist group founded by Liu Sifu (Shifu) in 1911, members of which 'in 1917 ... were able to organize barbers and tea-house clerks in Guangzhou into China's first modern labor unions, and in 1918 ... led the way in China's first May Day celebrations in Guangzhou.' ⁶ Guangzhou was also the site of the first All-China Labour Congress, on May 1, 1922. As communist influence over the labour movement grew, the city continued to be a centre of activity where workers could organize and take action without incurring the harsh repression by warlords or foreign powers which periodically brought the movement to a standstill in north and central China. The 16-month Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike, beginning in June 1925 in response to the May 30th Incident in Shanghai, was perhaps the high point of the 1920s labour movement in China, with the communist-run strike committee constituting 'a kind of workers' government' ⁷ in Guangzhou.

After the suppression of the Shanghai uprising in April 1927, and of several subsequent rebellions in that year including the Guangzhou uprising mentioned above, the 'Red' (communist) trade unions were driven underground in Guangzhou as in other cities, but continued their activities as best they could alongside the 'Yellow' (Guomindang (GMD)) and 'Grey' (neutral) trade unions. The restrictions on communist leadership of trade unions in this period apparently did not prevent workers from continuing their 'spontaneous economic struggle for existence' ⁸; according to one observer, such leadership had in any case been 'only a spark set to tinder, and it was almost spontaneous combustion ... the workers

6 Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, 15. The anarchist leanings of these two groups are confirmed by Jean Chesneaux (*The Chinese Labor Movement*, 136).

7 Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement*, 293.

8 Nym Wales, *The Chinese Labor Movement*, 63.

organized themselves.' ⁹ Throughout the 1930s and during the Anti-Japanese War, 'an "unorganized" labor movement ... seethed constantly below the surface and burst out in sporadic and spontaneous strikes and disputes, in which Chinese labor [showed] remarkable resourcefulness, tenacity and courage.' ¹⁰ Workers in Guangzhou were 'monitored and clamped down upon' under GMD rule, but continued and even intensified their activities 'precisely because of this', giving them the potential 'to become a powerful anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and anti-bureaucratic capitalist force.' ¹¹ With or without the leadership of underground communist activists, the labour movement continued in the cities and rose to new heights after the Japanese surrender, with more than three million workers taking part in strikes during 1947 alone. ¹²

Workers' linking of economic and political struggles in areas under GMD control drew praise and encouragement at labour movement congresses during the civil war years and after. A speaker at the 6th All-China Labour Congress in 1948 noted with approval a rise in workers' political consciousness and an understanding that 'livelihood and starvation are not just economic questions, but also political ones.' ¹³ In similar vein, the 7th ACFTU Congress in 1953 recalled that in GMD-ruled areas,

9 Ibid., 11-12.

10 Ibid., 67.

11 *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 31.3.50, 'Summary of the Guangzhou Labour movement since liberation and main tasks for the future', 85.

12 *Xinhua News Agency*, 26.8.48, 'On the labour movement in areas under GMD rule: a summary of Zhu Xuefan's report to the 6th All-China Labour Congress', in *Selected Documents of the Chinese Labour Movement* (hereafter *Selected Documents*), 57.

13 Ibid., 50.

it was necessary for the trade unions to lead the workers to wage both legal and illegal economic struggles under every possible and favourable condition, and to link these struggles closely with the political struggle ... [before liberation] all economic struggles waged by the trade unions had political significance.¹⁴

Thus the political aspects of the labour movement before liberation were regarded as not only acceptable, but absolutely necessary. This is in sharp contrast to the role mapped out for unions under the new communist government, and, as we shall see, the transition for unions and workers alike was not an easy one.

Within this militant and politicized labour movement, feelings seem to have run extremely high in the years immediately preceding liberation. Speeches at meetings were sprinkled with emotive references to workers' 'life-or-death struggle'¹⁵ in the climate of economic collapse and political oppression which increasingly prevailed in GMD areas; roll-calls of fallen comrades were followed by a minute's silence, and then by declarations that 'the day will come when we demand that the murderers pay all these blood debts in full.'¹⁶

The question arises as to whether this sort of rhetoric was simply demagoguery on the part of labour movement leaders in the safety of the liberated areas, or whether it actually represented the mood of the workers involved in the struggle. The latter view finds some support in what we know about GMD

14 Xu Zhizhen, 'Report on the amendment to the constitution of the trade unions of the People's Republic of China', *The Seventh All-China Congress of Trade Unions*, 86.

15 Ibid., 51.

16 Ibid., 54.

policies in this period: membership in GMD unions was compulsory, with the unions designed as a means of exercising control over workers¹⁷, demonstrations were broken up, in Guangzhou as elsewhere, with armed force, and activists were subject to harassment, restriction, arrest, and even execution. Some GMD union leaders in Guangzhou held concurrent posts in the police department, and used their police powers to intimidate workers.¹⁸ Workers had ample reason for hostility towards the GMD regime, and this hostility is in fact reflected in their attitudes towards anyone connected with the GMD and its unions, and especially towards former police or military police, when the time came to decide on criteria for union membership after liberation: although it was general CCP policy only to exclude a small minority of those most 'tainted' by their GMD activities, workers tended to propose rather broader restrictions.¹⁹ It is therefore quite possible that labour movement leaders were responding to the strength of feeling among workers when they made the sort of statements quoted above, and were obliged to do so if they themselves were not to become irrelevant.

Given this sort of militant atmosphere among workers in cities still under GMD control, it is clear that workers' expectations of their new position after the anticipated communist victory were likely to be high. It was noted in the second half of 1948 that workers were 'greatly encouraged'²⁰ by what they heard about rural land reform in areas already liberated, and they looked forward to a similar process taking place after the liberation of the cities. That the takeover

17 Wales, *The Chinese Labour Movement*, 6.

18 'Summary of the Guangzhou Labour movement...', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 87.

19 See for example 'Summing up the work of setting up a trade union in the China Textiles no.9 Textile Mill, *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 37.

20 'On the labour movement in areas under GMD rule', *Selected Documents*, 51.

of industry and commerce in cities such as Guangzhou would resemble land reform was an abiding fear among what were termed national capitalists or the national bourgeoisie. These people saw themselves as the next likely victims, after the landlords, of immediate and probably violent expropriation, and no amount of reassurance by the CCP that the Party's targets were imperialists, bureaucratic capitalists and a minority of reactionary or 'feudal' elements ever really dispelled this fear. Its persistence among Guangzhou's remaining capitalists²¹ may be explained by the considerable pressure from workers for precisely such a policy.

But from about the middle of 1948 it began to become apparent that workers' demands were not going to be met, or at least not immediately, as CCP policy on the takeover of industry shifted, and the idea that 'the ultra-egalitarianism of the "peasant socialist" period of land reform should be applied to the industrial sphere'²² was supplanted by the more moderate policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital'. Briefly, under this new policy, as many capitalists and private enterprise managers as possible in cities like Guangzhou were to be encouraged to stay on under the new regime and to keep in operation any enterprise which was of benefit to the national economy and to the people as a whole. Expanding employment and alleviating shortages were the priorities, and the overriding need to restore and develop industrial production was the main motivation for pursuing a policy towards private industry which top Party leaders

21 It is still evident in, for example, *Nanfang Ribao* 20.8.51, 'Decision to mobilize the working masses for democratic reform movement reached by South China Sub-bureau of Central Committee', in *Current Background* 115, 10-11; *Nanfang Ribao* 4.9.51, 'Continue the penetrative development of the democratic reform movement', in *Current Background* 128, 36-7.

22 William Brugger, *Democracy and organization in the Chinese industrial enterprise, 1949-1953*, 64.

admitted was essentially 'reformist' ²³ rather than revolutionary.

Given their preference for a radical, land reform-type takeover of industry and commerce, it comes as no surprise that many workers were highly suspicious of the Party's policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital' in private enterprises, which they viewed, not without reason as we shall see, as a cover for their continued exploitation by capitalists. The problem of the clash between workers' expectations and actual Party policy was addressed by Li Lisan in May 1949, when he discussed the differences between the situation in the countryside and in the cities as follows:

Some people say that the Communist Party's method of liberating the peasants was good and very simple: they took the landlords' property and distributed it equally to the peasants, so why can't they distribute the capitalists' property to the workers, instead of carrying out the development of production and only then being able to improve workers' lives? ²⁴

In the countryside, he explained, the peasants worked harder and produced more once freed from the exploitation of landlords, 'so the result of the equal distribution of land was that we were able to increase agricultural production' ²⁵, with consequent benefits for peasants' purchasing power, which in turn expanded markets and gave impetus to industrial production. But applying the rural policy to industry would mean that 'society would move

23 Li Lisan, 'Some points of explanation on the policy of developing production and benefitting both labour and capital', *Selected Documents*, 84.

24 Ibid., 73.

25 Ibid., 73.

backwards and livelihoods would decline' ²⁶, as a literal dividing up of capitalists' property - factories and machinery - would make it impossible for factories to go on producing. Workers, he insisted, 'certainly cannot divide up the capitalists' factories; on the contrary, they must do their utmost to protect the factories and increase production, for only that will be of benefit to the workers.' ²⁷

In Li's analysis, of the three main causes of workers' hardship in the past (imperialist, bureaucratic capitalist and feudal oppression and exploitation; oppression and exploitation in enterprises owned by the national bourgeoisie; and the under-development of Chinese industry), the first had already been eradicated and the second considerably restricted by the new people's government and the leading position of the working class, leaving just the third to be tackled by workers' own efforts in a 'production alliance' with capitalist employers. Their capital was vital to the transformation of China's backward economy; increases in production brought about by workers' hard work would unavoidably benefit capitalists, and their increased profits from the surplus value produced by workers would be exploitative in nature, but this situation was historically necessary, and 'excessive exploitation' ²⁸ could and would be prevented. The sole criterion on which private enterprises were judged was whether or not they were beneficial to the national economy. ²⁹

Li's point about the need to persuade the national bourgeoisie to stay on and keep investing in enterprises is a

26 Ibid., 74.

27 Ibid., 74.

28 Ibid., 74.

29 Xinhua News Agency, 21.9.48, Correctly uphold the policy of benefitting both labour and capital, Selected Documents of the Chinese Labour Movement, 70.

reasonable one, but his overly literal interpretation of what workers were demanding when they called for capitalists' property to be distributed to them fails, perhaps deliberately, to address workers' real political aspirations. He is careful to concentrate on the impracticality of physically taking factories apart and 'distributing' them to workers, but never mentions the possibility of workers' taking control of the (intact) enterprise in which they worked. That this possibility existed was shown by the experience of the north and northeast, the earliest industrialized areas to be liberated, where many private enterprises were in fact run by workers after being abandoned by their former owners and all or most of their management personnel.

This more radical, as well as often more violent, takeover of industry in the north and northeast illustrates the general principle that 'the earlier a particular city was liberated the more radical was the takeover of its industries likely to be.'³⁰ Hence the policies towards private industry implemented in Guangzhou, one of the last cities to be liberated by the CCP and its armies, and a place where large numbers of private enterprises remained in private hands for up to seven years after liberation³¹, were very moderate when compared with those of earlier liberated areas; and workers in Guangzhou, with their history of labour movement militancy and high expectations for the new era under communist rule, found these policies correspondingly difficult to accept. That the new CCP city government never entertained the idea of allowing workers to take over and run their own enterprises did little to deter workers from pushing in this direction; nor did it prevent some 'overzealous union

30 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 67.

31 It was reported in Hong Kong's *Wen Hui Bao* that a total of 4,727 industrial units were taken into joint state-private ownership in Guangzhou during 1956, i.e. they remained under private management until then. These units employed a total of 60,000 workers (*Wen Hui Bao* 4.2.57, in *SCMP* 1468, 19).

organizers who had interpreted Marxism-Leninism far too literally' from 'forcibly concentrating power in the hands of the workers' ³² in the early spring of 1950. Thus the scene was set for conflict between the CCP and workers as soon as the Party took power.

After liberation: The new unions and management democratization in the 'last difficult year'

There is no doubt about the seriousness of the economic problems facing both the workers and the new government of Guangzhou at the beginning of 1950, the 'last difficult year' ³³. The head of the Guangzhou General Trade Union (GTU) Preparatory Committee, Liao Siguang, reported in December 1949 that less than a quarter of the city's enterprises were operating at full capacity, while nearly a third of the entire workforce was unemployed. ³⁴ The CCP's priorities in this situation were emphasized by speakers at the city's first Workers' Representative Conference, held in mid-December 1949 and attended by representatives elected from among the workers, staff and technicians of Guangzhou's enterprises. Ye Jianying, head of the Military Control Commission which governed the city immediately after liberation, addressed delegates primarily on the responsibilities of workers as the leading class in the new society, and warned them of compromises which would have to be made. In order to consolidate the leading position of the working class, he said,

we must be good at uniting our own class, raising

32 Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism*, 76.

33 *Renmin Ribao* 6.2.50, 'Mastering enterprise management', in *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 2.

34 'Summary of the Guangzhou labour movement...', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 85.

our political consciousness, and distinguishing between immediate and long-term interests and between partial and overall interests, and must subordinate immediate and partial interests to long-term and overall interests ... and so, under certain circumstances, it will sometimes be necessary to make some concessions to other classes.³⁵

But the moderate policy towards industry, with its emphasis on compromise for the sake of production, economic recovery and keeping enterprises in business, did not mean that workers' interests and aspirations were to be ignored altogether. They could not be, for it was recognized that the mood among workers was such that management democratization in state enterprises and an improvement in labour-capital relations in private enterprises were urgently required if this policy were to succeed, as was the rapid organization of workers into new, official trade unions. The demand for democratization and participation by workers in enterprise management was the other main feature of the Workers' Representative Conference, although, as would be the case with later campaigns for democratization, its importance for the restoration and development of production was the point most strongly emphasized: the *Renmin Ribao* insisted that the participation of workers in democratic enterprise management was 'the reason why labour productivity in New Democratic or socialist societies tends to be higher than in capitalist

35 'Speech of General Ye Jianying, Head of Guangzhou MCC', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 79. It should be noted that although Party officials habitually refer to themselves as belonging to the working class, this is more of a rhetorical device or a reflection of political ideals than a statement of fact. According to the *Renmin Ribao* 25.4.53, there were 'only a handful' of worker Party members at liberation, increasing to 6.3% in 1951 and 7.2% in 1952 (figures quoted in Harper, 'Party and Unions', 111.).

countries'.³⁶

But in addition to its role in promoting production, democratization of enterprise management was also the main symbol of the changed status of workers after liberation. While the right to use the traditional weapons of labour, such as strikes, was not withdrawn from workers under the new regime, workers were told that they '[did not] need to and should not use [these] methods of struggle which harm production.'³⁷ Whether disputes arose with state enterprise administrators or with capitalists in private enterprises, they could all be resolved by consultation and negotiation through workers' 'own trade unions and own government'; these methods were adequate because 'there could certainly be no circumstances where the government, led by the working class itself, would fail to protect the interests of the working class.'³⁸ The fact that workers were being asked to exchange their cherished weapons of struggle from the pre-liberation labour movement for the new structures of democratic management, which would make them the partners, rather than the opponents, of management, demonstrates the importance of these structures' living up to expectations and giving workers some genuine role in enterprise management. We will now turn to a detailed examination of the nature of the management reforms undertaken in both private and state enterprises, and of the extent to which they provided workers with real influence in the enterprise, before looking at the new official unions and their changing relationship with both workers and management, and the influence this had on the progress of the reforms.

36 *Renmin Ribao* 6.2.50, in *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 5.

37 Peng Qingzhao (ed.), *A political textbook for workers*, 29-30.

38 *Questions on the labour movement* (third collection), 56.

The labour-capital consultative conference

In all the CCP's efforts to improve labour-capital relations after liberation the emphasis was on compromise, with workers' wages and conditions being improved only to the extent that struggling enterprises could afford, and capitalists being allowed a reasonable level of profit. The labour-capital consultative conference (LCCC, laozi xieshang huiyi) was intended to be an institution where representatives of both labour and capital could discuss all matters relating to pay, conditions, profit, and production in an enterprise (or sometimes in a trade or industry), on the basis of equality, in a way which took into account the fundamental interests of both sides. The conclusion of an industry-wide labour-capital collective agreement in a particular city was often a first step towards this form of management.³⁹

Opinions differ as to the effectiveness of the LCCC as an institution for workers' participation in the management of private enterprises in this period. As we shall see in the next section, when management democratization and workers' participation returned to the top of the agenda in the second half of 1956, state and joint state-private enterprises were criticized for having 'neglected the democratic tradition allowing workers in private enterprises to participate in management'⁴⁰. This would seem to imply that management reforms in this direction had been fairly successful in the private sector, at least in comparison with state enterprises.

On the face of it, LCCCs seemed to be weighted in favour of the labour side: disputes which could not be resolved were

39 See for example 'The Guangzhou pedicab industry - summarizing the conclusion of a labour-capital collective agreement', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 60-66.

40 Lai Ruoyu, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing) 23.11.56, in *SCMP* 1422, 3.

to be referred to the local Labour Bureau, which in all probability would be staffed by officials with a union background who could be expected to come down on the side of labour in most cases. 'A capitalist was still a capitalist and the machinery worked against him.' ⁴¹ Added to this, the two sides took turns in chairing the conference's meetings, and the secretary of the enterprise Party Committee was a labour representative, both of which militated against the institution being dominated by the factory director or manager (this was a major problem with the factory management committee in state enterprises, about which more will be said later.).

But it should be remembered that the LCCC was primarily 'a potent instrument for use by the Party or union against the capitalists.' ⁴² Whether or not workers themselves could actually exercise any influence depended on the attitude of their union representatives, who would not necessarily share or support workers' views. Nor were capitalists always as constrained by their somewhat ambiguous status under the new regime as might be supposed: one writer finds that the LCCCs 'did not function well, if at all' because managements' fears of 'unreasonable demands' from workers and 'infringements on their administrative authority' ⁴³ led them to impede the operation of the conferences by their non-cooperation. In cases where the trade union was ineffective in defence of workers' rights, it was even possible for capitalists 'to achieve the goal of "benefitting only the capital side"' ⁴⁴ by means of the LCCC.

41 Harper, 'Workers' participation in management in Communist China', *Studies in Comparative Communism* IV (July-Oct. 1971), 121.

42 Ibid., 119. Emphasis added.

43 Lee Lai To, *Trade Unions in China, 1949 -*, 90.

44 'Achievements and current problems of LCCCs in Tianjin', *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 48.

Guangzhou's earliest experiences with LCCCs illustrate some of the difficulties involved, including labour representatives' problems in dealing with uncooperative or opportunistic attitudes on the part of capitalists. At the same time as the GTU set out to mobilize workers for the signing of collective agreements and the establishment of LCCCs, it was also charged with organizing management democratization in state enterprises, and with the formation of basic-level trade unions as well as fifteen city-wide industrial trade unions, so it is hardly surprising that progress was patchy, with notable successes in some areas alongside almost complete failure in others. The Guangzhou GTU had the experience of earlier liberated areas to draw on: the first edition of *Guangzhou Gongyun* contained materials on LCCCs and collective agreements from Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao and Zhengzhou. The GTU work groups sought to apply lessons from these areas to the particular problems of Guangzhou, but they were hampered in this by their own lack of experience. Trade union cadres in Guangzhou shortly after liberation were a very mixed bag: it was observed at the time that 'some have come from Hong Kong, some were originally in the Guangzhou underground, some are newly recruited, and some have come from the north, and the majority of those who have come from the north only have rural experience, [all of] which shows that we lack knowledge of the city of Guangzhou, and in particular lack experience of working under our own regime.'⁴⁵ It is clear from this last point that the problem of the transition from all-out struggle, between labour and both capitalists and the government, to moderation and compromise was as acute for some trade union organizers as it was for many workers.

Although the GTU had originally intended to start with mobilizing workers in the large and long-established textile industry in Guangzhou to establish collective agreements and LCCCs, it eventually decided to concentrate on the pedicab

45 'Continue to study and take it a step higher', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 56.

industry, since this was where the most labour-capital disputes were occurring⁴⁶: more than four hundred were reported in the three months between liberation and the conclusion of a collective agreement.⁴⁷ Disputes had escalated to a point where workers were in imminent danger of losing their livelihood, and moreover 'some of the more conscious workers' had already begun to organize and take action on their own behalf, 'launching a petition movement and preparing to put various demands to the capital side'.⁴⁸

Despite this promising basis for the mobilizational efforts of the GTU work-group, they did experience some difficulty in their initial contacts with workers. Realizing that workers had been put off by their rather formal, official first approach, the work group tried a different tack.

Dressed like pedicab workers, we went to low-class tea-houses and places where the pedicabs stopped to talk to the workers, and in this way we gained quite a lot of accurate material about the pedicab industry and came to understand the workers' lives and demands.⁴⁹

Cadres' lack of experience showed in other ways as well. The capital side seems to have been much better prepared and more effective during negotiations than were the cadres and workers' representatives on the labour side, who, for example, found themselves unable to dispute capitalists' assertions about their finances and what constituted a reasonable level of profit as they had not worked out their

46 'Guangzhou GTU Preparatory Committee work report for February 1950', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 28.

47 'The Guangzhou pedicab industry', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 60.

48 *Ibid.*, 60.

49 *Ibid.*, 61.

own figures beforehand. This led to 'a lot of difficulties which could have been avoided' ⁵⁰. From this experience we can see how it might have been possible for capitalists, who on occasion turned up for negotiations accompanied by their lawyers, to turn institutions such as the LCCC and collective agreements to their own advantage.

Although the agreement eventually negotiated in the pedicab industry was regarded as a success, the GTU was criticized for failing to mobilize workers to organize a trade union at the same time, and the GTU Preparatory Committee's work report for February 1950 acknowledged that their achievement in mobilizing the pedicab workers was an isolated one. Some progress had been made in the tobacco industry, where an agreement drafted by workers had been widely discussed and had the support of several thousand workers. The work of organizing a trade union preparatory committee had also basically been completed alongside the drafting of the agreement, but further progress had been halted because the capital side 'closed the doors' ⁵¹ and refused to discuss the draft. It transpired that at least one cigarette factory boss had heard that the draft contained an article obliging managers to go on paying workers if production had to be suspended because of lack of business, whereupon he immediately sacked 160 women workers. ⁵² GTU cadres 'pointed out that the draft agreement contained no such article, and moreover the agreement would only be concluded if both sides were willing, so if they had any objections, they should

50 Ibid., 66.

51 'Guangzhou GTU Preparatory Committee - work report for February 1950', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 28. Immediately after liberation some capitalists had similarly prevented work groups from the GTU form entering their enterprises and talking to the workers. See 'Summary of the Guangzhou labour movement ...', in *ibid.*, 85.

52 'GTU work report', in *ibid.*, 21.

discuss them with the workers.' ⁵³ This reassurance resulted in the reinstatement of the 160 workers, but negotiations remained stalled.

Mass sackings by the remaining private employers had been expected in other industries in Guangzhou in February, as the Lunar New Year which fell in that month was the traditional time of year for settling debts and firing any workers surplus to requirements. Some capitalists attempted to preempt GTU action by sacking workers early, before the contents of a Labour Bureau order reminding employers and employees of the law had percolated down to workers, but the GTU was able to force the reinstatement of most of these, and by its own account was able to prevent any further sackings and consequent deterioration in labour-capital relations around the time of the New Year festival itself. ⁵⁴ It can be seen from these early experiences, however, that capitalists were not as inhibited by the policies and regulations of the new regime as might be expected, and showed little hesitation in acting in defence of their own interests. It is equally clear that the apparent built-in advantage for the labour side in the new structures for the management of private enterprises did not always live up to expectations, even when workers had the full support of their union representatives.

Democratization in state enterprises: the factory management committee and workers' representative congress

If progress in the reform of labour-capital relations and the establishment of LCCCs was slow, management democratization in state enterprises fared little better in the first few months after liberation. At the same time as it was bemoaning its lack of progress in mobilizing workers to

53 Ibid., 21.

54 Ibid., 20.

sign labour-capital collective agreements in private enterprises, the Guangzhou GTU also reported at the end of February 1950 that 'up until now, not a single FMC has been set up' ⁵⁵ in enterprises taken over by the state, in spite of the first Workers' Representative Conference's endorsement of democratization as 'the most fundamental and most effective system' ⁵⁶ for the restoration and improvement of production. At the Conference, Liao Siguang had urged workers to

[d]emand participation in enterprise management. According to regulations, all state-run factories and enterprises should organize a factory or enterprise management committee, and we workers should delegate representatives to take part in management. [We will] realize the democratization of enterprise management, and bring to an end the past state of confusion and corruption in enterprise management. ⁵⁷

The regulations to which Liao referred provided for the establishment of a factory management committee (FMC) and a workers' representative conference (WRC) in every state enterprise. Workers in private enterprises were also encouraged to persuade management to adopt these forms, although in keeping with the policy of cooperation and equality between labour and capital, this could not be done by the workers alone without the agreement of the capital

55 Ibid., 10.

56 *Summary of the Guangzhou labour movement since liberation and main tasks for the future, Guangzhou Gongyun 1, 31.3.50, 91.*

57 *Summary of the Guangzhou labour movement since liberation and main tasks for the future, Guangzhou Gongyun 1, 31.3.50, 91.*

side. ⁵⁸

The FMC (gongchang guanli weiyuanhui) consisted of the factory director (as chairperson), the deputy director, the chief engineer and the chairperson of the trade union as *ex officio* members, plus other 'responsible production personnel, and a corresponding number of representatives of workers and staff' ⁵⁹. This made a total of between five and seventeen members, with the participation of responsible personnel being decided by the factory director, and workers' representatives elected 'by a general meeting of all workers and staff, or by a representative conference, called by the trade union.' ⁶⁰ The FMC was to be 'an administrative organization for unified leadership of the factory or enterprise' ⁶¹, with the following duties:

on the basis of production plans and various directives laid down by higher-level enterprise management organs, and in accordance with actual circumstances in the enterprise, to discuss and decide upon all important questions to do with production and management. ⁶²

These included production plans, management systems, the organization of production, appointment and dismissal of personnel, wages, welfare etc..

58 'Resolution on the present tasks of the Chinese labour movement (passed by the 6th National Labour Congress, August 1948)', *Selected Documents*, 10-11.

59 North China People's Government, 'Decision on the establishment of FMCs and WRCs in state and public enterprises and factories', in *Selected Documents*, 137-8.

60 Ibid., 138.

61 Ibid., 138.

62 Ibid., 138.



All the Committee's decisions were implemented by order of the factory director, and as chairperson, s/he had the power to take emergency decisions alone, subject only to seeking the Committee's retrospective approval, and to veto majority decisions which s/he judged to be 'in conflict with the interests of the enterprise, or not in keeping with higher-level directives' ⁶³, provided s/he sought immediate guidance on the matter from higher-level organs. In cases like this, the majority on the Committee could also report its divergent views to higher-level organs, but had to implement the factory director's decision pending further guidance. In large enterprises a standing committee consisting of the director, the trade union chairperson and one elected representative could be formed to take charge of day-to-day business and oversee implementation of the committee's decisions. In newly liberated cities such as Guangzhou, military representatives stationed in factories were also automatically members of the FMC and the standing committee.

The WRC (zhigong daibiao huiyi) was the forerunner of the workers' congress (zhigong daibiao dahui) which was promoted from 1956 as an antidote to the excesses of Soviet-style 'one-man management' and a solution to workers' alienation from both management and the official trade unions. It was to consist of representatives directly elected by workers and staff from their own production small group or shift. These representatives were 'directly responsible to the workers and staff electing them' ⁶⁴, and if found to be unsatisfactory, they could be recalled and dismissed by their electors at any time. Barring such recalls, representatives were to be re-elected annually. Meetings of the WRC were to be held once or twice a month, generally outside working hours, and were to last not more than half a day. ⁶⁵ In enterprises with less

63 Ibid., 139.

64 Ibid., 140.

65 Ibid., 140-141.

than two hundred workers, monthly or bimonthly meeting of the entire workforce would serve as the WRC. In large enterprises which consisted of more than one factory or production site, each constituent part was to elect its own, basic-level WRC which could then delegate representatives to a general WRC covering the whole enterprise, but the principle of direct election by all workers and staff of the basic-level WRC was strongly emphasized.⁶⁶

The WRC was essentially intended to be a forum for consultation and communication between management, in the guise of the FMC, and workers and staff. Its powers were limited to hearing and discussing FMC reports, checking on the committee's administrative management and leadership work-style, and making proposals or offering criticism.⁶⁷ The WRC's decisions would not come into force until ratified by the FMC and implemented by order of the factory director. The WRC also served as a representative conference of the factory's trade union organization, and the trade union committee was obliged to implement all its decisions on trade union business.⁶⁸

It is clear from the above description of the structure and workings of the FMC that early concerns about the 'potentially undemocratic nature of the [factory director's] veto'⁶⁹, and about the dominant position of the director or manager in general, were not without foundation. Given the active cooperation of the director and other 'responsible personnel', it is possible that workers' own views, expressed

66 Ibid., 141.

67 Ibid., 141.

68 Ibid., 141. The trade union committee could only change WRC decisions with the permission of higher-level trade union organs.

69 Brugger, Democracy and organization in the Chinese industrial enterprise (1948-1953), 220.

by their union representatives on the committee, could carry some weight. Harper considers that since union cadres could be drawn from among political activists and outstanding producers in the workforce, the union presence on the committee 'did provide for some actual worker representation', particularly in the few months immediately after liberation when '[a]s enterprises were taken over by the state, the initial surge would be for some significant workers' role' ⁷⁰, but concedes that both the FMC and WRC could equally easily be ignored, especially when the enterprise leadership was preoccupied with economic difficulties. In most circumstances, 'it is very likely that the manager, together with the chief engineer, could always play down the opinions of unions and workers' representatives.' ⁷¹

The WRC tended to act as 'a rubber-stamp body' ⁷² for decisions of the factory director and the FMC; since its own decisions were not binding on the FMC, it could have little real influence. Reports on the workings of the WRC in the first few months after liberation are scarce, especially in comparison with the LCCC. However, there are signs that workers initially attempted to turn the WRC into a rather more influential body than had been intended in the regulations. Given the almost total absence of press comment it is difficult to tell exactly what was happening in these early months, but for some reason, meetings of the WRC, rather than taking up only half a day as specified in the regulations, were going on for at least three or four days, and quite often for ten days or up to half a month, taking up production time. ⁷³ Inadequate preparatory work and a failure to focus discussion on key issues were blamed for the excessive length

70 Harper, 'Workers' participation', 117.

71 Lee Lai To, *Trade unions in China*, 98.

72 Harper, 'Workers' participation', 115.

73 *Gongren Ribao* 9.3.50, 2.

of meetings, but it seems likely that workers' eagerness to participate in discussions on all aspects of the enterprise's work in this, the only official forum for workers' views, was the cause of these prolonged discussions. They could also be taken as evidence of conflict between workers and unions on the one hand and the administration and Party on the other.

Guangzhou was by no means out of line with the rest of the country in its slow progress in the democratization of state enterprise management. A *Renmin Ribao* editorial in February 1950 mentioned progress in the northeast of China, but qualified this with the statement that 'we must frankly admit that we are still not managing all enterprises well, and indeed are managing some very badly.'⁷⁴ The absence of FMCs in some state enterprises was also noted in the *Gongren Ribao* the following month⁷⁵, and even where structures for democratic management were set up, workers' problems in actually using them to exert influence over the running of the enterprise were still considerable. In order to understand what was happening in both state and private enterprises in this period, and to find the root causes of workers' problems with management democratization, it is necessary to examine the development of the official unions. Workers' ability to make use of the formal participatory structures available to them, with union cadres representing workers on the LCCC and FMC and being in overall charge of the WRC, depended on the unions' degree of support for workers' views and demands. This was the decisive factor in determining whether or not workers could actually participate in the management of their own enterprises. The official unions had a duty to protect workers' democratic rights, and as we will see in the next section as well, whenever they were unable or unwilling to discharge this duty, workers lost any chance of exerting

74 *Renmin Ribao* 6.2.50, 'Mastering enterprise management', in *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 2.

75 *Gongren Ribao* 5.3.50, 1.

influence through the formal channels of democratic management.

The trade unions after liberation

There is an obvious contrast between the proper role of the trade unions under a socialist government, as described in the introduction to this study, and the way in which unions and workers were operating in Chinese cities immediately before liberation, in the militant labour movement with strong political overtones which existed then. Such was workers' belief in the importance of unions that, in spite of the overwhelmingly negative picture of the GMD's 'fake' trade unions painted by CCP propaganda (which, it must be remembered, had considerable basis in fact), when it came to the dismantling of these organizations, there was a feeling among workers that 'they knew that the fake trade unions were bad, but in the end they were better than no trade unions at all, and if a labour-capital dispute arose, what then?'⁷⁶ This strong support for the traditional, adversarial type of union created difficulties in the transition to a cooperative rather than a confrontational role for unions, one in which they would have responsibilities to management and the state as well as to their own members. It proved to be a transition which union organizers were not always immediately able, or willing, to make.

The first few months after October 1949 have been characterized as a period 'when workers struck at will and frightened capitalists closed their factories'⁷⁷, and given what we know about the mood among workers before liberation and their expectations of the new era, this is a credible description. The annual report of the All-China Federation of

76 'GTU work report', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 30.

77 Harper, 'Party and unions', 91.

Labour (forerunner of the ACFTU) published in May 1950 confirms this impression, acknowledging as 'unavoidable' the fact that 'workers who have long been under capitalist exploitation and oppression become rather retaliative and show an extreme leftist tendency.'⁷⁸ What seems to have caused particular concern was the inclination of some unions to support these 'leftist' workers, and to attempt to use institutions like the LCCC, set up in support of the policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital', to make gains for workers at the expense of private management.⁷⁹ The administration and even the factory director in some state enterprises seem also to have come up against union-led opposition from workers.

Union cadres were criticized in the press for continuing to regard the enterprise administration as an enemy after liberation, and it was reported from Tianjin that union officials there were reluctant to hold discussions and consultations with the enterprise administration in the latter's offices, for fear of workers' branding them 'the running dogs of the administration'.⁸⁰ This sort of pressure and criticism from workers was not union cadres' only motive for their stand, although it must have been a powerful one, given that the new unions were anxious to differentiate themselves from the GMD's 'fake' trade unions, which they dismissed as having done nothing at all for the workers who were forced to join except control them on behalf of management and the state.⁸¹ But in addition to this, some union cadres also seem to have thought that the proclaimed

78 *Zhongguo Gongren* 15.5.50, 'Annual report of the All-China Federation of Labor', in *Current Background* 24, 4.

79 *Ibid.*, 5; 'Achievements and current problems of LCCCs in Tianjin, *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 48.

80 *Gongren Ribao* 13.10.49, 1.

81 'Summary of the Guangzhou labour movement', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 86.

policy of democratization in enterprises justified their attitude.

A series of articles by the paper's editor, Chen Yongwen, published in *Gongren Ribao* in early March 1950 dealt with various questions concerning enterprise democratization, and in particular attempted to clear up any confusion among union cadres as to the difference between democratization aimed ultimately at improving workers' work performance and increasing production, and what was termed 'extreme democratization', which was how workers' demands to take control of their own enterprises were characterized.⁸² Chen observed that some union officials had forgotten about the production goals of democratization and were instead concentrating on mass mobilization and the launching of a 'democratic movement'.

The result is that they intentionally or unintentionally 'mobilize the masses' and stir up opposition to and disputes with the administrative leadership; and they intentionally or unintentionally lead the masses in raising a lot of demands relating to purely economic interests which cannot all easily be resolved straight away. Problems thus cannot be solved, but on the contrary become a barrier between the leadership and the masses.⁸³

This sort of 'extreme democratization' was described as 'very harmful to production' and 'even worse than no democracy at all'⁸⁴. A later article in the same series revealed that some union officials saw the factory director's right to veto

82 See *Gongren Ribao* 3.3.50, 2, and 8.3.50, 2. There were seven articles in all, appearing on March 3-5 and 7-10.

83 *Gongren Ribao* 3.5.50, 2.

84 *Ibid.*, 2.

FMC majority decisions as incompatible with management democratization and therefore opposed it, but this view too was condemned as likely to undermine state leadership over enterprises and lead to 'anarchist, syndicalist extreme democratization.'⁸⁵

But union support for workers' apparent preference for 'extreme democratization' was short-lived. As industry and commerce in China's cities slipped into a period of crisis between March and June 1950, the Party felt it necessary to intervene to curb the number of industrial disputes and enforce its policy of giving priority to economic recovery and stability. Pressure was brought to bear on the unions to concentrate on production and support the leadership of their enterprises, whether state or private, with the result that

during the spring months of 1950 the unions stressed compromise and ignored class struggle, often siding with the plant administration. In private enterprises, unions approved capitalists' suggestions for reducing wages and welfare benefits. In state-run enterprises, the same conservative tendency appeared, with the unions and the management 'speaking the same phrases' and the unions behaving as no more than an arm of the administration.⁸⁶

Unions in Guangzhou and elsewhere took this line during the spring and early summer of 1950 not only because the government, alarmed at the prospect of union-backed leftism among workers, felt itself 'compelled to restrain some of its overzealous union organizers who ... were forcibly concentrating power in the hands of the workers.'⁸⁷ A

85 Gongren Ribao 8.5.50, 2.

86 Harper, 'Party and unions', 92.

87 Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, 76.

second reason which should also be noted is that at the beginning of March 1950, as pressure on unions to side with management for the sake of production was intensifying, union organization in later liberated areas was still proceeding rather erratically, with some union preparatory committees in Guangzhou yet to recruit a single member⁸⁸. The ideal that the new unions should be regarded by workers as 'their own' organizations through which they could run their own affairs was, as we shall see, far from being realized, and in the absence of strong, effective trade unions which were in touch with workers' views and demands and were prepared to support them, workers' ability to defend their interests in the enterprise could only be extremely limited.

A 1953 survey of the first three years of union work in Guangdong province concluded that union cadres had made serious errors in their top-down, undemocratic and formalistic approach to union organization⁸⁹, and the same criticisms were made by workers right at the beginning of the process in spring 1950. Early problems identified in Guangzhou's basic-level trade unions included cadres' failure to entrust any tasks to workers or activists. Workers complained that union cadres were 'ineffective [and] monopolize work that should be done by others'⁹⁰, and although these criticisms were not fully accepted by the GTU, they admitted that such accusations did 'reveal our weak points.'⁹¹ Cadres were reminded that their job was 'to guide the masses to begin actively running their own trade union ... It is not to monopolize the masses'

88 'GTU work report', 11.

89 'Summary of Guangdong trade union work over the past three years and future tasks', *Nanfang Ribao* 25.4.53, 2.

90 'Continue to study and take it a step higher', *Guangzhou Gongren* 1, 57.

91 *Ibid.*, 57.

affairs and mistrust them.' ⁹²

There was also a lack of democracy within unions in some important respects: the leaders of some union small groups in Guangzhou enterprises were found to be taking decisions and making plans on their own without any consultation, and simply giving orders to ensure their implementation, a work-style which was described as 'inadequate as far as being a leader is concerned' ⁹³. Cases occurred where candidates for the chair of enterprise trade unions 'only had to put their names forward, and didn't allow workers to cast ballots to elect them.' ⁹⁴ In addition, the GTU had set up cadre training courses for union activists, with the intention of providing trainees with 'the qualifications to be elected to chair various trade unions.' ⁹⁵ Problems sometimes arose in union elections when cadres did not trust the workers to vote for the activists who had been on this sort of training course and were thus the best qualified for the posts, and were tempted to apply 'official safeguards of correctness' ⁹⁶ to ensure the election of the 'right' candidates. This sort of conduct was definitely not in keeping with the injunction that democracy should be 'the soul of the trade union' ⁹⁷.

The main motive for union cadres' high-handed and mistrustful attitude towards workers, which led them into

92 'Work experience of the China Textiles trade union in Qingdao over the past two months', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 54.

93 'Continue to study ...', 57.

94 Ibid., 58.

95 'GTU work report', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 11.

96 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction of the lesson of democratic reform in factories and mines', *Gongren Ribao* 12.9.51, in *Current Background* 123, 5.

97 'Have close ties with the masses, consolidate and broaden trade union organization', *Gongren Ribao* 1.1.51, in *Zhongguo Gongren* 12, 2.

'closed-doorism', i.e. setting excessively stringent conditions for union membership, was their view of the problems inherent in the social and political background of workers. Workers in Guangzhou had, until very recently, not only been under GMD rule, but had also belonged to GMD-run unions, membership of which was compulsory for all workers over sixteen years of age, as well as to numerous secret societies which had links both to organized crime and to GMD labour organizations. This emphasis on the 'complex nature of the working class' ⁹⁸ was criticized as an overly simplistic view, likely to undermine the trust in and reliance on the working class which was supposed to exist by putting undue stress on the presence within its ranks of 'local ruffians, bandits, special agents, landlords, [and] mercenaries' ⁹⁹, thus 'only looking at the dark side created and left behind by the old society' ¹⁰⁰, and ignoring working class activism and the historical tradition of struggle and solidarity. There was a tendency for cadres, particularly from the earlier liberated areas, who had long been CCP members or who had fought in the Red Army, to consider workers inferior in the light of their revolutionary history, and in some cases to distrust workers who 'had made rifles for the enemy' ¹⁰¹.

It should be mentioned that the fear of infiltration of unions by reactionary elements or 'feudal remnants' (leaders of secret societies etc.) was not confined to those cadres who were responsible for the slow pace of recruitment into unions. Workers, too, were extremely wary of allowing undesirables with strong GMD connections into the new union organizations, and discussions as to the degree of involvement which should

98 'Some questions concerning the promotion and training of worker cadres', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, 20.12.50, 7.

99 Ibid., 7.

100 Ibid., 7.

101 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 71.

constitute a bar to membership were often prolonged.¹⁰² Aware that their own involvement in various organizations, however peripheral or unwilling, made them suspect in the eyes of cadres with impeccable revolutionary credentials, workers on the enterprise union preparatory committees were particularly anxious not to recommend for membership anyone who might subsequently be exposed as a special agent, for fear of inadvertently associating themselves with the Party's opponents.

Attempts to deal with these attitudes among cadres and workers which were hindering rapid expansion of union membership took the form of assurances regarding the real nature of the overwhelming majority of the working class and the purpose of the unions themselves. All were reminded that actual special agents, although they did exist, were a tiny minority, and that the best way to root them out was to bring all workers into the trade union, where they could be educated and have their political consciousness raised, after which it would be extremely difficult for any reactionary elements among them to pass unnoticed. Workers were assured that

there was no need to worry even if special agents did sneak in, as after they had been discovered they could then be expelled from the trade union as necessary, and this certainly couldn't implicate the person who recommended them.¹⁰³

A plan for union organization passed by the GTU on 14 March 1950 stressed that the enrolment of members and the training of new union cadres was the 'main task'¹⁰⁴ of the enterprise

102 'Setting up a trade union in the China Textiles no.9 Textile Mill', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 40.

103 Ibid., 40.

104 'Latest plan for work of organizing trade unions in Guangzhou', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 35.

preparatory committees, and emphasized that recruitment should begin on the very first day of such committees' existence. This exhortation seems to have been heeded, as recruitment subsequently proceeded more rapidly, and in fact the presence of 'feudal elements' in the new unions did necessitate later campaigns, some prolonged, to expose and remove them.

But since difficulties with recruitment were rooted in some cadres' view that most workers were of such a low cultural and political level that they had no place at present in the trade union, simply insisting on rapid, mass recruitment of members did not necessarily solve the underlying problem. Once inside the trade union, many workers would still come up against strong resistance from cadres who were unwilling to allow workers to take over trade union work themselves, and who regarded the training and encouragement of union activists as at best a necessary evil. Thus both cadres' attitudes towards workers' suspect social and political background, and the pressures of Party policy in this period of economic crisis, militated against the new unions being able to fulfil their stated objective of becoming the workers' own democratic organizations, and furthermore undermined workers' role in democratic enterprise management, which as we saw above depended on effective representation and support for workers by union cadres.

Much criticism during 1950 was directed at union cadres' reluctance to do more than pay lip-service to the idea that workers could and should be entrusted with the running of 'their own' trade union, with cadres simply providing assistance and education. This was particularly true of the second half of the year, as the extent of workers' discontent with 'their' unions, and the consequences for enterprise democratization which the unions' attitude entailed, became apparent. Cadres were frequently warned against high-handedness and 'putting on official airs', and reminded that workers were their political equals, and, moreover, knew a

great deal more about many aspects of the enterprise's operations than they did. The magnitude of union cadres' tasks and their lack of experience made it essential for them to be 'good at learning from the workers and consulting the workers' ¹⁰⁵. Reminders to union cadres of the importance of internal democracy and of trusting in and relying on the workers abound in labour movement and other press articles from this time, but their very frequency (and their continual reappearance over the years) attests to the difficulties encountered in making the official trade unions truly democratic and representative organizations which workers would treat as their own.

Some of the early problems can probably be excused as teething troubles, although we should beware of making too great an allowance for cadres' lack of experience or heavy workload, since the latter was often caused by their own reluctance to delegate work to activists or ordinary union members. But year-end reports on the progress of trade union work during 1950 confirm that throughout the year, workers in all parts of the country were voicing the same sort of complaints about the unions as had workers in Guangzhou during the initial stage of union organization in early spring. These reports give the impression that the criticisms and complaints raised by many workers at this early stage in the new unions' development could not be so easily dismissed. In Shanghai, union cadres' emphasis on production tasks, at the expense of welfare, safety and hygiene work and the protection of workers' interests, meant that workers were entirely at the mercy of administrative cadres in their enterprises. These cadres were described as

lacking in the concept of relying on the working class ... the workers' management committee is treated as a cipher, very little attention is paid

105 'Continue to study ...', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 56.

to workers' positive proposals , [and] workers' safety and problems which must and could be solved are often brushed aside.¹⁰⁶

This situation was exacerbated by the attitude of union cadres, with the result that

When the administration has no regard for workers' safety and hygiene and doesn't respect workers' opinions, and the trade union doesn't care either, this makes the workers see the trade union as merely the administration's union and not their own.¹⁰⁷

It is clear from this comment that workers had identified the role played by the new unions in this period, correctly, as that of an arm of the administration. The unions' adoption of this role demonstrates the difficulties inherent in their mandate to act in the interests of both workers and management, particularly at this early stage where they were under strong Party pressure to enforce stability and order in enterprises, while at the same time lacking the necessary integration with workers which could have balanced the emphasis on industrial peace at all costs with a deeper understanding of workers' views and essential interests.

As had been the case in Guangzhou, workers everywhere made frequent criticisms as the year wore on of the lack of democracy in the unions, most of which 'concerned the fact that [union cadres] attach little importance to suggestions put forward by workers, or brush them aside.'¹⁰⁸ When cadres did take action, for example on welfare, it was

106 'Some questions concerning the work of basic-level trade union organization', *Zhongguo Gongren* 12, 20.1.51, 18.

107 Ibid., 18.

108 Ibid., 20.

reported that

they don't consult the workers beforehand and give no explanation after the event. What is more serious, however, is that they ... don't have the slightest scrap of fraternal class feeling or affection for the workers and staff.¹⁰⁹

Decisions were made by higher-level trade union organs without regard to the actual situation on the factory floor, leading workers to accuse union cadres trying to implement these decisions of being 'the higher-level trade union's trade union, not a union for us workers.'¹¹⁰

Union officials were also criticized for their treatment of the many trade union activists who had emerged during various movements, who felt that cadres 'only emphasize[d] making use of them and not training them; only require[d] them to be active and [gave] no consideration to their actual level and difficulties; criticize[d] a lot and [gave] little encouragement'¹¹¹, causing widespread demoralization. The basic problem with the official unions was that of responsibility without power, and this problem was most acute for union activists, the lowest level of the hierarchy and at the sharp end of workers' discontent while having the least ability to do anything to meet their demands. We will find these comments from demoralized union activists repeated almost verbatim during 1956, showing the persistence of the problem.

A Gongren Ribao article published around the same time as the report quoted above included some reference to the achievements of the new trade unions during 1950, but also

109 Ibid., 20.

110 Ibid., 18.

111 Ibid., 21.

featured a similar litany of complaints and criticisms. Union organization, particularly at the basic level, was described as 'not very sound', and the persistence among union cadres and in many unions of 'the serious phenomenon of separation from the masses' ¹¹² was noted. The article went on to discuss the reasons behind this separation as follows:

[It] is primarily because some trade union cadres are still not good at showing consideration for the interests of the broad working masses. For example, in state-owned enterprises, the common task of the trade union and the administration is of course to guarantee the completion of state production plans, but because of this, some trade union cadres forget to give consideration to the interests of the working masses in their daily life, and turn a blind eye to their most urgent requirements. ¹¹³

The article repeated the charge that problems which could and should be solved were being neglected, and that unions were failing to exercise their legal right to represent workers' interests and to seek solutions to problems from the administration. Nor did it find the performance of trade unions in private enterprises to be without defects:

In private enterprises, there are a few trade union cadres who not only are not good at giving consideration to the interests of the working masses, but who even take the place of the capitalists in carrying out 'firing workers and lowering wages', and who openly speak on the capitalists' behalf. Because of this, in some trade unions the phenomenon of the masses' not trusting

112 Gongren Ribao 1.1.51, 'Have close ties with the masses, consolidate and broaden trade union organization', in *Zhongguo Gongren* 12, 20.1.51, 2.

113 Ibid., 2.

the trade union and the trade union being divorced from the masses has appeared.¹¹⁴

These observations confirm the unions' tendency to act exclusively in the interests of management, whether state or private, and of production and stability, thereby neglecting the interests of workers.

Problems with democracy within the unions were also noted in this article, with reports that some union cadres both at the higher and basic levels were still being appointed rather than elected, and showed some reluctance to promote worker activists to cadre status, rejecting these 'mass leaders who really are supported by the broad masses'¹¹⁵ because of their lack of qualifications or seniority. This attitude was said to be 'fundamentally wrong ... All trade union organizations must come from the bottom up, democratically elected by the masses.'¹¹⁶ Some unions were 'still lacking various systems of democratic life'¹¹⁷, such as regular meetings, consultation with members and reporting back on decisions and progress, and opportunities for criticism and self-criticism. The article reported that 'work-styles of coercion, commandism, and monopolizing all work oneself'¹¹⁸ still existed, and gave the example of a factory where union cadres interfered in the running of a union election, insisting that workers voted for candidates who had returned from union training classes, 'incurring the masses' universal dissatisfaction.'¹¹⁹ We have already heard of similar cases in Guangzhou during 1950. Finally, there seems to have been

114 Ibid., 2.

115 Ibid., 2.

116 Ibid., 2.

117 Ibid., 2.

118 Ibid., 2.

119 Ibid., 2.

a particular problem with union finances, with some union organizations collecting dues but failing to do anything for their members and not publishing accounts, and even cases of waste and corruption. In view of the main criticisms of the GMD's 'fake' trade unions, i.e. that their leaders were corrupt and simply pocketed members' dues with no intention of using the funds for the benefit of workers, the effect of this sort of conduct on workers' attitudes towards the new unions can be imagined.

It is clear from the above criticisms of unions that, after a brief initial period in which they sided with workers and sought to continue their traditional role as the representative of workers' interests first and foremost, they were soon pressed towards the other extreme of their remit, almost invariably siding with management and the Party against workers. This change was not only the result of the change in Party policy, which now leaned heavily towards subordinating workers' demands to economic recovery and stability. It also stemmed from the separation of union cadres from their worker members, as mentioned above: union cadres had slipped into the undemocratic workstyle of the old-style bureaucrat, and since they were not consulting with workers and seldom sought their opinions, they were unlikely to come under effective pressure from workers to support their preference for 'extreme' democratization of enterprise management.

The implications of the unions' shift from siding with workers to siding with management can be seen if we examine the way in which the policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital' developed in private enterprises during the first half of 1950, and in particular the way that union cadres' attitudes affected the functioning of the LCCC. The early post-liberation surge of union-supported leftism among workers must have confirmed many capitalists' fears about their likely fate under the new regime. In some places they were reported to be understandably nervous about how their workers, now

officially the masters, would treat their former oppressors: in Zhengzhou there was said to be 'panic' amongst capitalists, some of whom 'did not even dare to show their faces and run their businesses' ¹²⁰, and it was reported from Shanghai that

During the period of GMD rule, some unenlightened capitalists trampled on and humiliated the workers, and moreover practised extreme exploitation of workers, but since liberation the workers have stood up and resisted or retaliated, and so the capitalists are uneasy and worried, they adopt a negative attitude towards production, and a minority of them are even deliberately delaying the resumption of production, which further incurs the dissatisfaction and opposition of the workers. ¹²¹

This situation was said to be common in recently liberated cities. ¹²² But as we have already seen, there was scope within the LCCC system for the capital side to further its own interests at the expense of labour, and this became even easier once Party pressure on the unions to curb workers' 'retaliative' tendencies in private enterprises began to take effect in March 1950.

Reviews of labour-capital relations after the Three- and Five-Anti movements ¹²³ maintain that before these movements,

120 'Introducing the Zhengzhou traditional medicine industry's experience of signing a collective agreement', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 70.

121 *Xinhua News Agency*, 6.9.48, 'The correct way to solve labour-capital disputes', *Selected Documents*, 86.

122 *Ibid.*, 86.

123 The Three-Anti movement was launched in late 1951 to combat the problems of waste, corruption and bureaucratism in the state bureaucracy, including the

it was commonplace for capitalists to use the LCCC to assert their managerial authority, insisting on the right to sack workers or reduce wages without consultation.¹²⁴ A report on unions in north China's private enterprises admitted that

Before the Five-Anti movement, because of deficiencies in trade union work the masses were not mobilized, and so in very many factories and shops the policy of benefitting both labour and capital was not genuinely implemented, and in a good number [the policy] was to 'benefit only the capital side'.¹²⁵

Since capitalists had come under sustained attack during the Five-Anti movement, with great efforts in the labour movement press in particular to whip up feeling against them, reports such as these are likely to take an especially negative, and possibly exaggerated, view of the extent to which LCCCs and the 'two benefits' policy in general were used against workers. Yet there is earlier evidence from several parts of China, including Guangzhou, which confirms this tendency: we have already seen how ready some private employers in Guangzhou were to sack workers as a way of saving money on wages and welfare expenditure immediately after liberation, despite the intervention of the GTU. So it seems probable that during 1950, the pressure on workers to moderate their demands and even accept pay cuts or dismissals to help

administration of state-run enterprises. This campaign was later extended to the private sector in the form of the Five-Anti movement, which was directed against the so-called 'five poisons' practised by some private capitalists: bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and theft of secret state economic data.

124 See for example 'Exposing the capitalists' criminal attacks on unions and workers', *Gongren Ribao* 7.4.52, 2.

125 'Trade union work in north China private enterprises', *Gongren Ribao* 20.9.52, 1.

enterprises stay afloat was indeed exploited by some capitalists, who

lack[ed] sincerity and [were] always trying to 'use' the trade union and control the workers, or use overcoming difficulties and tiding [the enterprise] over a difficult time as a pretext to force workers to reduce their wages and standard of living, to achieve the goal of 'benefitting only the capital side'. ¹²⁶

From the middle of 1950, capitalists were widely criticized for having sought advantage for themselves at workers' expense during the spring economic crisis, 'totally violating unity and the spirit of "all being in the same boat"'. ¹²⁷ Warnings had been given to cadres in the earlier liberated areas about the

tendency ... of one-sidedly stressing the interests of the capital side, conniving at the capitalists' law-breaking and violation of discipline, and failing to intervene on encroachments on workers' legally established rights, so that we sacrifice the fundamental interests of the workers. ¹²⁸

But despite this early awareness of the likely problems, this tendency soon came to the fore in later liberated areas such as Guangzhou, and was given additional impetus by CCP policy,

126 'Achievements and current problems of LCCCs in Tianjin, *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 48.

127 'Some mistaken viewpoints which cause the LCCC to degenerate into mere form', *Shanghai Laodong Bao* 24.5.50, in *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 51.

128 *Xinhua News Agency* 21.9.48, 'Correctly uphold the policy of benefitting both labour and capital', *Selected Documents*, 70.

as unions in private enterprises were exhorted to concentrate on productivity and discipline, using the same methods as in state enterprises, e.g. labour emulation competitions, in an effort to persuade capitalists to stay in business.¹²⁹

It had earlier been maintained that the policy itself was not at fault, but that 'some private industrialists and commercial proprietors ... twist[ed] the meaning of government policy, wilfully behaving illegally in violating the proper rights of workers'¹³⁰. Later, however, there was some recognition that the policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital' had erred too far in the direction of benefitting the capital side; most of the blame was attributed to the unions for failing to protect workers from exploitation, which was slightly unfair as their line had been 'a correct interpretation by union leaders of CCP directives in those days of economic crisis'¹³¹. But whether the fault lay with the policy itself, as framed by the Party, or with its implementation by the trade unions, there was a clear acknowledgement that workers' opposition to it was to some extent justified.

The reassessment of Party policy on private enterprises was paralleled by a reconsideration of whether moderate policies on the takeover of state enterprises had been entirely appropriate. From quite early in 1950 it began to be suggested that although slogans such as "don't smash the old structure to pieces" and "preserve original positions, salaries and systems"¹³² had been correct at the time of liberation, the policy of maintaining the *status quo* had had

129 *Gongren Ribao* 23.6.50, 1.

130 *Xinhua News Agency* 21.9.48, 'Correctly uphold the policy ...', *Selected Documents*, 69.

131 Harper, 'Party and unions', 92.

132 *Renmin Ribao* 6.2.50, 'Mastering enterprise management', in *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 2.

the disadvantage that 'we could not help inheriting temporarily the many disruptive phenomena of disunity, irrationality, anarchism and disorganization, and some corrupt systems.' ¹³³ A union report in May of the same year went further, conceding that the decision to 'maintain the *status quo* at various national enterprises so as to keep them intact ... was suitable for the taking-over stage, but not for stages when enterprises had been brought under control' ¹³⁴, and that 'some of the cadres in managements and trade unions misapplied the policy of the taking-over stage to the control stage'. ¹³⁵

This reluctance in many state enterprises to make the radical changes favoured by workers, it was now admitted, had hindered progress in management democratization. Once again, the trade unions were at fault for their failure adequately to represent and protect the interests of workers: union cadres could hardly defend workers' right to participate in management against the indifference or hostility of administrative cadres, who regarded workers as incapable of participating effectively, when they themselves, as we saw earlier, only paid lip-service to the idea that trusting and relying on the workers should be the heart of all work, including enterprise management.

The attitude of union cadres who monopolized all work themselves and merely gave instructions to workers in fact mirrored that of many administrative cadres, who saw measures for management democratization as an extra burden on top of their other work rather than a progressive reform, and who were keen to bypass the FMC as it took too long to convene and

133 Ibid., 3. See also Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 231.

134 'Annual report of the All-China Federation of Labour', *Zhongguo Gongren* 15.5.50, in *Current Background* 24, 10.11.50, 4.

135 Ibid., 4.

involved too many workers who were inexperienced in management and did not always express themselves well. That similar attitudes should exist, and often prevail, in an organization intended to be the workers' own, reveals the sort of obstacles workers faced when they tried actually to play their allotted role as 'masters of the enterprise', and gives a clue as to why dissatisfaction with their own mass organization appeared among workers at such an early stage of the new, official trade unions' development.

The unions' subordination to state enterprise management during much of the first half of 1950 left workers with no means of enforcing their right to participate in enterprise management, because, as we noted earlier, the mere existence of democratic structures such as the FMC and WRC was not enough to guarantee that workers' participation would become a reality. Despite the official insistence that democratization was essential for the development of production, many cadres still regarded it as an optional extra on which, given their other pressing tasks, they should not waste too much time, and unless union officials were effective in insisting on workers' democratic rights in the enterprise, the dominant position of the factory director in the state enterprise management structure would allow management to brush workers' views aside.

This is in fact what seems to have happened in the first half of 1950, judging from subsequent criticisms of the slow progress of management democratization. It was reported that administrative cadres commonly regarded institutions like the FMC 'not ... as effective instruments, but as an extra burden, with the result that meetings are held purely for formalism.'¹³⁶ In some cases, administrative cadres agreed to the establishment of the FMC 'merely in order to "complete" the "task" of setting up the FMC decided upon at the higher

136 Ibid., 4.

level, and not because they genuinely want[ed] to implement democratic management.' ¹³⁷ This sort of Committee might either have a majority of cadre members, or might simply take no notice of worker members' views and not bother to assist them by explaining things or educating them for real participation, 'so when the time comes for an FMC meeting the worker members don't feel that it has any meaning ... Some worker members say: "We've come to listen to the meeting."' ¹³⁸

Typical cadres' comments on the faults of FMCs reported in the press included the following: "Holding a meeting of cadres will solve the problem just the same, so why do we have to hold FMC meetings? ... Workers only know what happens in one workshop, so how can they participate in democratic management of a whole factory?"' ¹³⁹; "the FMC has a lot of members, it's a bother to convene it, it drags on for ages and can't decide any issue", "the workers don't understand the overall situation and can't make speeches." ¹⁴⁰ The factory director's right of veto seems to have undermined administrative cadres' respect for the FMC, as they tended to 'set the factory director's right of final decision against the FMC', describing their respective functions thus: "You discuss, then at the end I make the decision." ¹⁴¹ In this context, puns on the Chinese word for democracy, *minzhu*, abounded, as in 'workers are the *min* (people), and the factory director is the *zhu* (ruler).' Frequent exhortations to cadres

137 *Renmin Ribao* 3.6.50, 'Do a good job of running FMCs and conscientiously implement democratic management', in *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 15.

138 *Ibid.*, 16.

139 *Ibid.*, 15.

140 *Dongbei Ribao* 9.6.50, 'What must be done in order to carry out the democratization of factory management?', in *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, 15.7.50, 17.

141 *Ibid.*, 15.

to implement resolutions passed by the WRC in this period also seem to indicate that the workings of that body were being largely ignored.

Strong criticisms of these attitudes, and of cadres' bureaucratist and commandist work-styles in general, reminded cadres that management democratization was 'not merely a question of methods, but in fact a question of ideology.'¹⁴² Proper operation of FMCs and WRCs was the 'key link'¹⁴³ in transforming old, bureaucratic capitalist enterprises into New Democratic enterprises, and it was emphasized that cadres must grasp 'the basic idea of relying on the assistance of the working masses in managing enterprises well'¹⁴⁴ if workers were to feel that they genuinely were masters of the enterprise and work accordingly. While it was conceded that worker delegates on FMCs, many of them with minimal education, were not always well equipped to play a prominent role in participatory structures, unions were reminded that it was their task, as 'schools of communism', to educate and assist workers so that they could participate effectively; it would be most unjust to keep workers in a subordinate position because of their lack of education, when this was a result of their low status in the old society.

Pressure for a change in policy grew as the results of the shift of unions' allegiance away from workers and towards enterprise management became apparent, and as serious and damaging criticism of the unions by workers mounted. Given its prominence both in official union reports and the main newspapers, there seems to be little doubt that it was mainly the volume and seriousness of workers' criticism and discontent which prompted the change. A union rectification

142 Ibid., 28.

143 *Renmin Ribao* 6.2.50, 'Mastering enterprise management', in *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 6.

144 Ibid., 5.

campaign began in August 1950 in which union cadres undertook self-criticism of the commandist and bureaucratist attitudes they had earlier displayed. There was no sudden switch to all-out support for workers' opinions and demands; in order to do this, union cadres would first have needed to know what precisely those opinions and demands were, and as we have seen, it was their alienation from the workers and ignorance of their views which brought about the crisis in the first place.

But all levels of the union hierarchy seem to have agreed that their previous neglect of workers' welfare and interests had allowed both capitalists in private and administrative cadres in state enterprises to ride roughshod over those interests, and that if workers' new status as 'masters of the enterprise' was to mean anything, this state of affairs had to be remedied forthwith. So while there was no immediate reversion to supporting workers' demands for 'extreme democratization', from the beginning of 1951 unions did place greater emphasis on their role as workers' representatives and advocates of workers' specific interests. This was soon to bring Party accusations of economism down upon basic-level unions, while at the higher, national level it was paralleled by moves towards increased union autonomy from the Party which were similarly unacceptable. In both cases, unions seemed much more inclined to position themselves on the side of the workers in their ongoing confrontation with the CCP, something which the Party could not be expected to tolerate.

The union 'crisis' of 1951 and democratic reform

When commentators discuss the early post-liberation crisis in relations between the official unions and the CCP, it is usually the events of 1951 to which they refer, although

as we have just noted, unions' support for workers' leftist inclinations immediately after the CCP victory in 1949 was a major source of friction as well. Although the Party took action to curb the related trends of economism and syndicalism within the unions and the ACFTU hierarchy at the end of 1951, replacing Li Lisan as head of the ACFTU with Lai Ruoyu, it was not until early 1953 that any reports or analyses of these problems were made public. Belated attacks on both economism and syndicalism featured prominently in reports to the Seventh All-China Congress of Trade Unions in May of that year, but these criticisms were for the most part directed specifically at the top leadership of the ACFTU. The question thus arises as to how far this high-level conflict was reflected in events at the enterprise level, and how the confrontation which had unfolded after liberation between workers and the Party, centred on the latter's policies on industrial management, developed under these circumstances.

Following the outpouring of workers' criticism which they had faced in the second half of 1950, and much of which they accepted, the trade unions in 1951 seem to have given far more attention to their role as the advocates of workers' specific interests in the enterprise. It was this attitude, and in particular their attention to the immediate material interests of workers, which was condemned as economism in 1953: basic-level unions were criticized for seeing a contradiction between improvements in workers' welfare and the development of production and for failing to understand that the former was in fact dependent on the latter, and were accused of irresponsibility in failing to persuade workers not to raise excessively high demands which could not be met under present circumstances.¹⁴⁵ Party concern about these tendencies was increased by the fact that they coincided with an attempt by Li Lisan to win greater independence from the Party for the ACFTU and its affiliated unions; syndicalism thus appeared to

145 Lai Ruoyu, 'Report on the trade union work in China', *The Seventh All-China Congress of Trade Unions*, 52, 66.

the CCP leadership to have permeated the unions from the lowest level to the highest.

If the unions' previous tendency to operate as an arm of management had been completely unacceptable to workers, its new emphasis on workers' interests was to prove equally objectionable to the Party. The problems in private enterprises were not so serious, being mainly of a practical rather than an ideological nature. That is, despite their obligation to mobilize workers for the completion of production plans, there was no ideological obstacle to unions' taking an independent line in defence of workers' interests when these were threatened by the actions of private management. After all, opposing 'excessive' exploitation of workers by the remaining capitalists while continuing and developing production had long been the unions' proper role in private enterprises, and represented a much less drastic shift away from their traditional, pre-liberation function. The practical problems concern the ability of basic-level union organizations to fulfil this role, an ability which is brought into question by the apparent need to conduct repeated rectification and reform campaigns, including the Democratic Reform Movement and the Three- and Five-Anti movements, to put union organizations on a sound footing. More will be said about these campaigns later.

But in the case of state enterprises the proper role of the unions was less obvious, and was the subject of a debate within the labour movement during 1951.¹⁴⁶ This debate centred on whether or not the standpoint of the trade union in a state enterprise should differ in any way from that of the administration. The official Party view was that it should not: since the long-term, collective interests of the working class were identical with those of its vanguard, the CCP, and of the Party's representatives in state enterprises, the

146 See Harper, 'Party and unions', 92-6, for a detailed discussion of this debate.

administration, there was no possibility of antagonism between them. Under these circumstances, the unions were responsible for persuading the less advanced section of the working class of this identity of long-term, overall interests, while at the same time keeping the Party informed of workers' own immediate interests; the unions were definitely not to become advocates of workers' short-term or purely material interests, since this would amount to a syndicalist challenge to Party supremacy.

The opposing position, taken by some union officials, was that the division of labour between management and workers still existed in state as in private enterprises, necessitating a difference in standpoint if unions were genuinely to be the workers' own organization which defended their interests. Unions would thus on occasion be justified in opposing the administration where its actions infringed on workers' interests, even though this ultimately meant opposing the Party, which appointed and controlled the administration. It was this view which was criticized in 1953 as 'a tendency in the trade unions of departing from the leadership of the Party.'¹⁴⁷

It seems extremely unlikely that there is no connection whatever between the attempts of the top-level union leadership under Li Lisan to win greater independence from Party control for the entire trade union structure, and the increasing tendency of basic-level unions to take a more independent line in siding with workers in defence of their interests in the enterprise. But this should not lead us to assume that one was a direct result of the other. While Li Lisan's actions as ACFTU leader probably helped to create a climate in which basic-level unions were able to shift towards a stronger and more consistent advocacy of workers' interests, this shift did not necessarily represent a response to

147 Lai Ruoyu, 'Report on trade union work', 52.

instructions or even direct influence from above; in fact, the weakness of vertical control of basic-level unions by ACFTU organs at this point precluded this possibility.¹⁴⁸

What is more likely, given what we know about how the unions had operated during most of 1950, and about workers' reaction to their perceived deficiencies, is that unions at various levels, including the highest, were responding to the same pressures, having realized that unless they made a real effort to represent workers in the enterprise and uphold their demands, their position would be untenable as they would be rejected by the workers. The union 'crisis' which is usually referred to as having occurred in 1951 thus becomes, in this version of events, the third phase of the ongoing confrontation between workers and the Party, with the official unions now more inclined to side with workers. Looking at the 'standpoint' debate in this context, it is evident that those union cadres who were insisting on a more independent stance for unions in state enterprises were responding to workers' earlier accusations that they were 'the administration's union and not [workers'] own.'¹⁴⁹ In opposition to this, the Party's formulation of the correct standpoint and role of the unions in state enterprises as described above would mean that unions were to continue to act as an arm of the administration, albeit the 'workers' own' administration.

It is difficult to gauge from contemporaneous press reports the actual extent of the economist and syndicalist leanings of basic-level unions during 1951, as all criticism of them seems to have been postponed until early 1953.¹⁵⁰

148 See Harper, 'Party and unions', 96.

149 'Some questions concerning the work of basic-level trade union organization', *Zhongguo Gongren* 12, 20.1.51, 18.

150 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 19.5.53, 2, 'Guangzhou FTU, Railway Management Bureau and other units hold training classes to popularize the experience of the Wusan Factory in trade union work'.

But it is safe to assume that the accusations made against union cadres at the Seventh ACFTU Congress did have some basis in fact: we know that the union rectification campaign of late 1950 was intended to move the unions away from unconditional support for the enterprise administration and towards stronger support for workers' views and interests, and that after their experiences of 'the administration's' unions, workers were likely to try to push the unions as far as possible in the opposite direction, with the likelihood that they would at times cross the boundary between acceptable reflection of workers' views to the Party and syndicalist advocacy of those views. However, flaws in the organization of the unions still remained, calling into question the degree to which unions even now were actually capable of pressing workers' demands and making 'economist' gains on their behalf.

Assuming that workers now had, in some cases at least, the support of their unions in upholding their interests and democratic rights in the enterprise, it might be expected that rapid progress would be made in the democratization of enterprise management, with a corresponding rise in workers' level of satisfaction with their new position under CCP rule and an easing of the conflict between them and the Party. But in fact the problems within union organizations seem to have undermined their inclination to support workers' demands for democratization. In the summer of 1951 we find that enterprise democratization in the Central-South region of China, which included Guangzhou, was judged to have made very little progress, leading workers to complain that "they [were] masters but [did] not have a say."¹⁵¹ It was admitted that most enterprises had 'not been able to solve their problems. Some of them did not go through any fundamental changes; only a limited number have undergone

151 Quoted in Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction...', in *Current Background* 123, 9.

comparatively thorough reform.' ¹⁵² This meant that 'the neglected lesson in democratic reform [had to] be made up' ¹⁵³ in the south. The problems which the Democratic Reform Movement (DRM), as well as the subsequent Three- and Five-Anti movements, was intended to tackle were present not only in state organs and the management of both state and private enterprises, but, as we shall see, also within the trade unions, where they continued to provoke dissatisfaction and discontent among workers. The period during which these three movements were carried out in Guangzhou (mid-1951 to early 1953) constitutes the final phase of this first confrontation between workers and the Party, as the Party sought to promote enterprise democratization and the purification and strengthening of the official unions without, however, unleashing the pent-up demand among workers for what it termed 'extreme democratization'. These campaigns were prompted by workers' protests and demands over the previous two years as well as by the tenets of the CCP's guiding ideology, but even as the Party implicitly acknowledged that many of these protests and criticisms had been justified, it still displayed a lingering mistrust of workers and a reluctance fully to mobilize them for democratization, and was quick to intervene whenever it feared that workers might be taking these movements to extremes.

The Democratic Reform Movement

The DRM was launched in the area under the jurisdiction of the Central-South Bureau of the CCP Central Committee in May 1951. It had already taken place immediately after liberation in the north-east of China and was subsequently implemented throughout the country, but the Central-South area 'bore the

152 Nanfang Ribao 10.7.51, 'Democratic reform in state enterprises', in *Current Background* 115, 3.

153 Ibid., 3.

brunt of the 1951 movement.' ¹⁵⁴ The reform, described as a historical phase 'which the workers must pass through in the process of emerging from the position of the ruled to that of the masters' ¹⁵⁵, was intended to complete the transformation of enterprises, changing bureaucratic capitalist enterprises into socialist (state) enterprises, and changing old democratic (private) enterprises into new democratic ones. As such, it seemed to promise the sort of radical reform of the old order in industrial enterprises which many workers had demanded immediately after liberation.

The fairly long delay in carrying out systematic reform in the south was defended as having been necessary in order to establish certain preconditions for successful democratic reform, such as workers' support for the CCP government, a rise in workers' political consciousness, gaining of experience by cadres, the suppression of counter-revolutionaries, and the establishment of Party, Youth League and trade union organizations in enterprises. ¹⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that although the DRM in south Chinese enterprises was supposed to be led by the FMC and the enterprise union, an exception was made in cases where the director or manager of the enterprise had been retained after liberation , or where 'the union was felt to be "impure"' ¹⁵⁷, because of the presence of former gang-

154 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 105.

155 Xinhua News Agency (Beijing) 20.8.51, 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau of the Central Committee on mobilization of the working masses in developing the Democratic Reform Movement', summarized in *Current Background* 115, 6.

156 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction of...', in *Current Background* 123, 3.

157 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 250. In such cases the DRM was to be led by a special committee under the leadership of the enterprise Party committee.

bosses ¹⁵⁸ and other degenerate elements of the working class. The movement can thus be seen as an implicit criticism of the failure of management democratization and of the shortcomings of the new trade unions, especially in a city like Guangzhou where these exceptional cases probably constituted a large proportion of the total. The 'purification of the basic trade union organizations' ¹⁵⁹ was included in the aims of the DRM.

The movement was mainly directed against remaining feudal or reactionary influences, and more specifically against the gang-boss system and secret societies:

The aim and purpose of democratic reform is to introduce a thorough reform of the gang labour system which imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism purposely established and cultivated in factories and mines to rule the masses of workers. ¹⁶⁰

But as with earlier measures for workplace democratization, emphasis was also placed on the beneficial effect it would have on production. The official directive on the launching of the DRM in the south explained that

158 The gang-boss, or labour contractor, was responsible for recruiting unskilled or semi-skilled labour in some industries before 1949, particularly in the mining and transport sectors. The gang-boss had a great deal of power over the lives of the workers he recruited, being able to hire and fire as well as taking a portion, often substantial, of workers' wages in return for employing them. Gang-bosses often had links with secret societies. See Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 42-47; Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labour Movement*, 54-64.

159 Nanfang Ribao 27.8.51, 'Delegates to Canton Conference support Democratic Reform Movement', in *Current Background* 128, 34.

160 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction...', *Gongren Ribao* 12.9.51, in *Current Background* 123, 4.

the idea is to rely upon the working class to rid the enterprises of all feudal, reactionary elements, reactionary systems and bad styles of work, to thoroughly wipe out obstacles to production, and to establish an overall system of democratic management to lead the workers' enthusiasm into production efforts, so that a new labour attitude and discipline can be established and the workers be made into a strongly organized class.¹⁶¹

The movement was to be carried out in three stages. The first, democratic struggle, would include mass meetings at which workers could identify and accuse gang-bosses and other 'feudal remnants'. Those identified would be dealt with according to the nature of their offence, their production abilities, their attitude towards labour since liberation, and their degree of repentance for past crimes. Penalties mentioned included demotion, reduction in wages, transfer to another post, public surveillance, and suspension of trade union membership¹⁶²; at the culmination of the movement on the Guangzhou docks, some 'special agents, labour blacklegs, despotic foremen, underworld gangsters and their stooges'¹⁶³ were sentenced to terms of imprisonment or to death. It was emphasized that the struggle was '"anti-feudal, not anti-capital"'¹⁶⁴, at least in private enterprises. The aim of the second stage, democratic unity, was 'to solve ... problems concerning the relations between workers and [white-collar]

161 Xinhua News Agency, 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau', *Current Background* 115, 7.

162 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction...', *Current Background* 123, 4.

163 Nanfang Ribao 9.10.51, 'Democratic Reform Movement developed in twelve cities in south China', in *Current Background* 128, 43.

164 Deng Zihui, vice-chair of the Central-South Bureau's Financial and Economic Committee, quoted in *ibid.*, 4.

employees, between the leadership and the masses, between old and new workers, between skilled and unskilled workers, and between different groups of workers.' ¹⁶⁵ The main methods used would be criticism and self-criticism.

The third and final stage was democratic construction, which involved raising political awareness in enterprises, establishing a new labour attitude, reforming and strengthening mass organizations, including enterprise trade unions, and establishing a democratic management system. ¹⁶⁶ This stage was to include 'provision for the regular reelection of labour union committees' ¹⁶⁷, a vital measure if unions were to be democratically controlled by their members. The inclusion of this measure can be taken as a sign that criticism of those basic-level organizations which failed to hold regular elections the previous year had not resulted in any marked improvement in the situation. Re-election of FMCs was also to take place during the DRM ¹⁶⁸, indicating that the democratic operation of these institutions was not proceeding as planned either. In practice, progress through the three stages of the movement was often slow, with the first stage not being completed in some cases until December 1951. The second stage did not take place in many enterprises until early 1953, while the third stage, the one intended finally to establish democratic management in all types of enterprise, was postponed in its entirety until after the Three- and Five-Anti movements had been completed. ¹⁶⁹

The influence of the gang-boss system, traditionally very

165 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau...', in *Current Background* 115, 8.

166 Ibid., 8.

167 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 111.

168 *Gongren Ribao* 22.10.51, 2.

169 Ibid., 110.

strong amongst transport workers, was a major problem in Guangzhou, especially on the docks. Early attempts led by the GTU to eradicate the system here where the problem was most acute were only partially successful¹⁷⁰, and when it was discussed as part of the DRM at the second session of the fourth Representative Conference of People from All Circles in Guangzhou in August 1951, it seemed that if anything, the situation had worsened since the GTU's early attempts at reform in 1950. A representative of the dock-workers at this Conference 'pointed out the extreme lengths to which wharf workers were [still] persecuted by remnant feudal influences'¹⁷¹. According to him, (all) dock-workers were members of at least one and up to eleven secret societies each, and were losing 70-90% of their pay to 'reactionary organizations and underworld bodies'¹⁷². These 'feudal remnants' also 'extorted money from merchants and travellers, thus seriously hampering the flow of supplies between urban and rural areas.'¹⁷³

But it was not only on the docks that gang-bosses and other 'feudal remnants' were still in existence and wielding influence. Elsewhere, too, they had not only not been eliminated, but had actually consolidated their position by gaining positions of power in the new management and trade union structures. After the launching of the DRM in Guangzhou in the summer of 1951, it was revealed that some 'feudal

170 See 'GTU work report', *Guangzhou Gongyun* 1, 24-5.

171 'Delegates to Canton Conference support DRM', *Nanfang Ribao* 27.8.51, in *Current Background* 128, 34. For an account of the operation of the gang-boss system on the Shanghai docks before and immediately after liberation, see Chen Gang, 'Changes at the Shanghai Harbour Docks', in Stephen Andors (ed.) *Workers and workplaces in revolutionary China*, especially 33-38, 89-94.

172 Ibid., 34.

173 Ibid., 34.

elements' had been 'able to use their former influence and connections' ¹⁷⁴ to become "members" of the Party and the Youth League and "cadres" of trade unions; some were even elected model workers.' ¹⁷⁵ As we noted earlier, after union organizers had been repeatedly criticized for 'closed-doorism' in recruiting members and paying too much attention to the 'complex' social and political background of workers in Guangzhou, the recruitment of union members proceeded much more rapidly and with less scrupulous examination of workers' backgrounds. This, coupled with the policy of temporarily 'maintaining the *status quo*' in enterprises after liberation, had allowed some political undesirables to keep their positions and a great deal of their influence over their fellow workers, hence their presence in positions of influence in various organizations.

It is interesting to note that in addition to their usual activities, gang-bosses were said to have '[taken] advantage of the weaknesses' ¹⁷⁶ of the often inexperienced management of state enterprises, and of the 'undesirable work style' ¹⁷⁷ of some of the enterprise leadership, in order to foment discord among workers and between workers and enterprise management. 'In this way they alienated the workers from the administrative authorities in factories and mines and hindered the Party from maintaining contact with the working masses.' ¹⁷⁸

174 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 79.

175 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction...', *Current Background* 123, 2. See also *Nanfang Ribao* 10.7.51 (reprinted from *Changjiang Ribao* 13.6.51), 'Democratic reform in state enterprises', in *Current Background* 115, 3.

176 'Democratic reform in state enterprises,' in *Current Background* 115, 3.

177 *Ibid.*, 3.

178 *Ibid.*, 3.

Some, it was reported, had 'agitated strikes' ¹⁷⁹. Indeed, some gang-bosses who 'had achieved prominent positions in management' were said to have 'engineered strikes and go-slow resistance' ¹⁸⁰ to the DRM itself. The degeneration of some basic-level trade unions into 'tails of management' 'meant that secret agents could hide behind left slogans and incite the workers to oppose both management and unions.' ¹⁸¹

Although in 1950 both Party and trade union authorities took very seriously workers' criticisms of basic-level unions which sided with management and found it necessary to respond to them, there were no references at the time to organized resistance from workers or strikes during this period. Yet these accusations against gang-bosses seem to indicate that such incidents did take place. Reference to them during the DRM is clearly intended to demonstrate both the extent of the influence of 'feudal remnants' and the damage it could cause in enterprises, but looking at them from a different angle, we can see these events as evidence of the depth of workers' discontent with the attitude of both the administration and the trade union. In the next section we will see how when unions failed to support workers and sided with management in 1956-7, workers were quick to bypass them and form their own organizations. While there is no evidence of this sort of self-organization during the early 1950s, discontented workers were clearly ripe for agitation against the enterprise leadership, something which must have acted as a warning to the official unions that their continued failure to support and represent workers in their dealings with management might render them irrelevant as workers formed alternative organizations. This may account for the unions' subsequent tendency to present themselves more as the workers'

179 Ibid., 3.

180 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 105.

181 Ibid., 100.

organization and the adversary of the administration¹⁸² during 1951.

This sort of activity notwithstanding, the continued influence of gang-bosses and other 'feudal remnants' was not generally to workers' advantage, as it was an impediment to the management democratization which was designed to allow workers to act as 'masters of the enterprise' in the new society. In effect, it kept enterprise management back in its pre-liberation state: workers in private factories in Guangzhou who were still 'ideologically and organizationally controlled'¹⁸³ by feudal or reactionary elements were said to feel that they 'had not yet achieved genuine liberation, as is reflected in their comments that "we are in a place that the sun doesn't reach", "the streets have been liberated, but not our factory".'¹⁸⁴

Back in March 1950, the Gongren Ribao had insisted that, contrary to the belief of many workers and union cadres, there was no need for any mass movement for democratization in enterprises¹⁸⁵. However, as the DRM was launched it was acknowledged that in fact a mass movement was necessary if the gang-boss system in particular was to be eradicated:

Mere dependence on government orders to abolish these [feudal remnants and] systems is ineffective; the labouring masses must be mobilized to stamp out the evils of such systems and remnants.¹⁸⁶

182 Nanfang Ribao 19.5.53, 2.

183 Nanfang Ribao 1.12.52, 2, 'The work of democratic reform is now unfolding in a planned way'.

184 Ibid., 2.

185 Gongren Ribao 3.5.50, 2.

186 Nanfang Ribao 20.8.51, 'Determine to mobilize the working masses, carry through the Democratic Reform Movement', in *Current Background* 115, 12.

But a mass movement in enterprises where reform since liberation had had only limited success could in itself create problems, and concerns about the possible dangers are evident in many of the early documents on the conduct of the movement.

One of the main dangers was that, given the involvement to some degree of the vast majority of workers in Guangzhou in some sort of reactionary, GMD-sponsored or 'feudal' organization ('yellow' unions, secret societies etc.), the movement's net would be spread far too widely. The cadres responsible for the movement were urged 'not to make too many enemies' ¹⁸⁷ during the course of the movement, and to ensure that the movement was directed only at the 'principal culprits' ¹⁸⁸, i.e. 'special agents, despots and underworld gangsters, but not the men deceived into joining their organizations.' ¹⁸⁹ While it was acknowledged that most workers had belonged to secret societies or 'fake' trade unions under the GMD, a *Nanfang Ribao* editorial insisted that

they deeply hate[d] these reactionary organizations. They should be clearly told that those who had been pressed into such organizations under coercion and were not seriously guilty should be pardoned. ¹⁹⁰

But at the same time as avoiding the danger of targeting ordinary workers, the leaders of the DRM, the Guangzhou Party Committee and the GTU, also had to guard against an extreme

187 Ibid., 12.

188 *Nanfang Ribao* 10.7.51, 'Democratic reform in state enterprises', in *Current Background* 115, 4.

189 *Nanfang Ribao* 27.8.51, 'Delegates to Canton conference support DRM', in *Current Background* 128, 34. Emphasis added.

190 'Determine to mobilize the working masses...', *Current Background* 115, 12.

response by these workers to what appeared to them to be a necessary and long overdue mass campaign to establish them as the real 'masters of the enterprise'. It was anticipated that workers might attempt to widen the movement by targeting the capital side in private enterprises, white-collar and technical staff, or even skilled workers. The danger stemmed from the fact that the policy of maintaining the *status quo* during the takeover of enterprises after liberation meant that staff and technicians had in many cases retained their original, relatively privileged position in enterprises, particularly in later liberated cities in the South. Since, as we saw in 1950, workers' leftist tendencies had been curbed and retaliation and the settling of scores largely prevented, this policy had given rise to a great deal of antipathy among ordinary workers, who often felt that the enterprise was still being run by the same small, pre-liberation elite while their suggestions for reform and attempts to participate were rebuffed. Thus there were fears among those about to launch the DRM that this long-postponed movement might prove too popular among workers, and would quickly get out of control. As we will see, these fears were not realised during the DRM itself as mass mobilization was generally unsuccessful, but something very similar did in fact occur at the height of the anti-capitalist Five-Anti movement.

While admitting that workers' feelings with regard to enterprise elites, whether technical or managerial, were not entirely unreasonable, the authorities stressed that technical personnel were 'an important force, indispensable to factories' ¹⁹¹, and that all those not found to be political counter-revolutionaries must be won over and reformed, 'despite the dissatisfaction of the working masses.' ¹⁹² Workers' disputes with staff and technical personnel were

191 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau', *Current Background* 115, 7.

192 'Determine to mobilize the working masses...', *Current Background* 115, 12.

classed as 'internal'¹⁹³ matters which 'should be openly discussed and settled'¹⁹⁴, but which had nothing to do with the movement to eradicate the minority of feudal elements 'who politically oppress and economically exploit and defraud'¹⁹⁵ the workers. The united front against these elements was to include not only staff and technicians who, 'under the old regime, might have offended the workers and aroused their dissatisfaction'¹⁹⁶, but also capitalists in private enterprises who 'had employed the feudal reactionary influences to maintain "order" '¹⁹⁷, incurring similar hostility among workers. Capitalists were deemed to have suffered the ill effects of these influences as well, and therefore their support for the movement '[could] and [had to] be secured.'¹⁹⁸ The reservations which are apparent in these documents about the advisability of mobilizing workers for an all-out mass movement give the impression that enterprise cadres were unlikely to give the movement their wholehearted support, and in fact cadres' lack of commitment to reform was soon to be identified as a factor hindering the development of the DRM in Guangzhou.¹⁹⁹

The movement in Guangzhou had its only notable success during 1951 on the docks, which, it was reported in October,

193 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau', *Current Background* 115, 7.

194 'Democratic reform in state enterprises', *Current Background* 115, 5.

195 *Ibid.*, 5.

196 'Directive of the Central-South Bureau', *Current Background* 115, 7.

197 *Ibid.*, 7.

198 *Ibid.*, 7.

199 *Nanfang Ribao* 20.9.51, 'Progress of democratic reform in state-owned enterprises slow, confusion noted', in *Current Background* 128, 38.

had already embarked on the third, democratic construction stage²⁰⁰. A 'marked change in [dock workers'] work attitude, in their unity, and in their mutual assistance' was noted, as was the fact that 'leadership cadres of all levels had begun to acquire a deep understanding of the significance and [necessity] of the movement.'²⁰¹ Summing up the success of the DRM on the docks, it was claimed that 'the basic labour union organizations [had been] reorganized and purified'²⁰², while 'the remnant feudal influences on the wharves had been wiped out, the political consciousness of the working class greatly raised, and a new labour attitude established.'²⁰³ It is possible that early efforts at reform among dockworkers, however little they seemed to have achieved at the time, provided the basis for a successful movement at the second attempt.

Towards the end of September 1951, five months into the movement, two DRM success stories appeared in the *Nanfang Ribao*, one about the experience of the state-owned Xinhua Rubber Works, and the other by the manager of the private Yi Chang Cigarette Factory²⁰⁴. Clearly aimed at giving impetus to the movement, the articles included comments from the two enterprise directors on the beneficial effects of the DRM on

200 *Nanfang Ribao* 9.10.51, 'Democratic Reform Movement developed in 12 cities in south China', in *Current Background* 128, 43.

201 *Ibid.*, 43.

202 'Delegates to Canton conference support DRM', *Current Background* 128, 34.

203 *Ibid.*, 35.

204 Guo Wen, 'The beneficial effects of democratic reform on production as I have felt it', *Nanfang Ribao* 28.9.51, in *Current Background* 128, 39-40; Chen Dong, 'Yi Chang Cigarette Factory provides illustration of beneficial effects of DRM', *Nanfang Ribao* 29.9.51, in *Current Background* 128, 41-2.

both production and worker-management relations²⁰⁵. In both plants it was claimed that the DRM had mobilized workers to rise up against 'feudal remnants' and remove them from their positions of influence, with positive results in terms of improvements in production and workers' morale and 'their spirit of being masters of the enterprise.'²⁰⁶ The manager of the Yi Chang Cigarette Factory, Chen Dong, admitted that the private management's initial worry 'that the movement might lead to a free-for-all among the workers' had been dispelled, as had fears of an adverse effect on production.²⁰⁷

However, despite these two well-publicized examples, an investigation by the Guangzhou CCP Committee into the DRM in seven enterprises in early September confirmed that success in the movement was largely confined to the docks, while 'progress was slow and confusion was prevalent'²⁰⁸ elsewhere. The Guangzhou Cement Works was reportedly still stuck at the study stage, while in other enterprises only a perfunctory struggle, or none at all, had taken place, and these enterprises had moved straight on to assessing workers for registration for labour insurance. It was also reported that mass mobilization had 'not [been] seriously taken up by the 1st [Guangzhou] Iron and Steel Works even after the discovery of the sabotage of production in the plant.'²⁰⁹ In the 3rd Iron and Steel Works, many of the workers were known to have had GMD connections, but

the leadership of the movement, although aware of

205 'The beneficial effects...', *Current Background* 128, 40.

206 Ibid., 40.

207 'Yi Chang Cigarette Factory provides illustration...', *Current Background* 128, 41.

208 'Progress of democratic reform...', *Current Background* 128, 38.

209 Ibid., 38.

the complicated situation relating to the political status of the men, resorted only to a very casual struggle, and proceeded immediately to the reorganization of the labor union, with the result that a former puppet officer was elected [as] representative of the workers.²¹⁰

The directors of these and the other enterprises investigated were called to a municipal Party Committee meeting to discuss the DRM, at which cadres were urged not to gloss over the difficulties involved in carrying through the reforms. Some of the specific criticisms made recall the complaints we heard in 1950 that administrative cadres were setting up FMCs in their enterprises in a purely formalistic way, because they had been told to do so rather than because they were committed to management democratization. During the DRM, as, one suspects, during many other campaigns, leading cadres in some enterprises merely went through the motions of struggle and eliminating feudal remnants, and were chiefly concerned with successfully completing this 'task' and returning quickly to normal operations. They did not consider it important actually to rid the enterprise of all 'feudal remnants', and were more concerned about the possible consequences of mass mobilization and the movement's adverse effect on production.

After the meeting a directive was issued recommending that administrative, Party, Youth League and union cadres 'should be ideologically aroused into attaching importance to the democratic reform movement'²¹¹, and that they should avoid the error of underestimating the enemy and overestimating themselves, 'leading to the hasty conclusion of the stage of struggle before the enemy has really been

210 Ibid., 38.

211 Ibid., 38.

systematically knocked out.' ²¹² Most of the blame for the DRM's slow progress was said to be 'traceable to ideological deviations on the part of the leadership' ²¹³, mainly bureaucratism, disunity and buck-passing.

Cadres were also warned against the 'highly erroneous attitude' of 'overcautiousness under the pretext of avoiding confusion, hesitation to mobilize the masses, and withholding of support for the workers' righteous demands [which would] result in detachment from the masses.' ²¹⁴ 'Avoiding confusion' usually meant restricting the scope and duration of the struggle to prevent the workers from going too far, and also to ensure the maintenance of production. This is a specific warning to cadres about the likely consequences of preventing workers from carrying out the sort of campaign they considered justified and necessary, and in the context of a meeting which was in effect a post-mortem on an unsuccessful phase of the reform movement, it indicates that cadres had in fact been hindering the movement in this way, resulting in 'separation' from disillusioned workers.

It was repeatedly stressed to unconvinced enterprise leaders that the DRM would not damage production:

On the contrary, it will render a service to production. Even if it yields temporary ill effects on production, yet in the long run it will be all to the good. It [would] be an error to resist or give up democratic reform under the pretext of maintaining production. ²¹⁵

212 Ibid., 38.

213 Ibid., 44.

214 'Democratic reform in state enterprises', *Current Background* 115, 5.

215 Ibid., 5.

Cadres were given examples of the effects the improvement in workers' morale would have on production, being told that 'in some factories democratic reform took up 20% of the working hours for a whole month. Yet production targets which had not been fulfilled in the past were overfulfilled on time.'²¹⁶ In this way the movement's leadership attempted to shore up ideological commitment to democratic reform in enterprises with a demonstration of the practical benefits it would bring for all concerned.

All the available evidence on the conduct of the DRM in Guangzhou during 1951 indicates that in most enterprises, cadres held back from complete ideological and practical commitment to the movement, mainly because of fears that workers, if they were allowed free rein, would quickly expand the movement to include almost all those in positions of power in the enterprise, and also because of related worries about its likely effect on production. Given the prevalence of this attitude, workers' own enthusiasm for the movement tended to evaporate.²¹⁷ The DRM's lack of success is shown very starkly by reports on what amounted to a re-launch of the movement in large sections of the city's industry at the end of 1952. Only the docks and state enterprises were said to have successfully completed the reform, while workers in private enterprises were still either openly or covertly controlled by 'feudal remnants and reactionary forces'²¹⁸, and the gang-boss system of labour contracting was still in operation in the construction industry. In fact, workers' views on the necessary breadth of the movement were to some extent vindicated by developments in late 1951 and early 1952, when the Three- and Five-Anti movements which then overtook

216 Liu Zijiu, 'On the belated introduction...', *Current Background* 123, 9.

217 'DRM developed in 12 cities in south China', *Current Background* 128, 43.

218 *Nanfang Ribao* 1.12.52, 2, 'The work of democratic reform is now unfolding in a planned way'.

the DRM were launched to remedy some of the very deficiencies in state organs, state and private enterprise management, and in the trade unions, which had hitherto impeded democratic reform.

The Three- and Five-Anti movements

The Three-Anti movement was launched towards the end of 1951 to combat the problems of waste, corruption and bureaucratism in the state bureaucracy, including the administration of state-run enterprises and the official trade unions. The campaign was later extended to the private sector in the form of the Five-Anti movement, which was directed against the so-called 'five poisons' practised by some capitalists: bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and theft of secret state economic data. In Guangzhou, these two movements were in effect intended to solve the problems of bureaucratism and separation from the masses in both enterprise management and the trade unions, the extent of these problems having been revealed by the failure of the DRM to achieve its aims of management democratization in enterprises of all types and the establishment of workers as the 'masters of the enterprise'. But although both movements were apparently approaching their conclusion in Guangzhou by the end of June 1952 amid official praise for their 'great victories'²¹⁹ and 'brilliant results'²²⁰, by October a 'thorough review of the achievements of the Three-Anti movement'²²¹ was underway in

219 Nanfang Ribao 15.6.52, '4th session of 4th Congress of People's Representatives of [all] Canton areas', in *Current Background* 187, 2.

220 Nanfang Ribao 15.6.52, 'Consolidate and develop the victories gained in the Five-Anti campaign', in *Current Background* 187, 5.

221 Tao Zhu, 'The present situation in Guangdong and our tasks and missions', Nanfang Ribao 28.10.52, in *Current Background* 226, 7.

Guangzhou, while doubts were raised about the actual results of the Five-Anti campaign as well.

As cases of bureaucratism and corruption among basic-level trade union cadres were exposed during the course of the Three-Anti movement, the unions were warned that they would have to reform their own organizations, satisfying the workers as to their probity and financial rectitude, if they were to be able to lead workers against 'lawless capitalists' in the Five-Anti movement.²²² Unions were supposed to lead the Five-Anti movement 'at the action level'²²³ in enterprises, and the movement is generally regarded as the high point of the influence of both workers and unions in private industry, establishing their rights over private management in what were subsequently known as 'state capitalist' enterprises. However, there was another side to the Five-Anti campaign: attacks on capitalists who had committed the 'five poisons' also revealed numerous cases of corruption of union cadres by these same capitalists.²²⁴ So while the movement is, rightly, regarded as an overall victory for unions and workers over the remaining capitalist employers, it also served to reveal the depth of the problems in some union organizations up until 1952-3, with Guangzhou by all accounts one of the worst affected areas.²²⁵

Uncertainty about the conduct and the results of the Five-Anti movement is evident even in the articles published in Guangzhou in June 1952 to applaud its achievements and anticipate its final victory. While not all commentators

222 See *Gongren Ribao* 16.12.51, 1; 20.2.52, 2; 9.4.52, 2.

223 Harper, 'Party and unions', 99.

224 See *Gongren Ribao* 29.2.52, 2; 5.4.52, 2; 16.4.52, 2. These examples, from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou respectively, are just a few of the many cases reported in the paper during this period.

225 See *Gongren Ribao* 16.4.52, 2; 11.3.55, 1.

would go so far as to say the movement had had a 'devastating effect' ²²⁶ on production and employment, there is general agreement that at its height ²²⁷ it did cause a number of enterprises to cease operations, and interfered with production in many others as workers' and union cadres' time was taken up with the movement, despite the slogan of 'struggling and carrying on production at the same time.' ²²⁸ In terms strongly reminiscent of those used immediately after liberation, industrial and commercial workers were urged to unite with the 'educated and reformed' ²²⁹ capitalists in restoring and developing production and enlivening the economy, while capitalists were offered loans and tax concessions to assist those in difficulties. ²³⁰ Capitalists were also assured that 'the object of the "Five-Anti" was not to exterminate the capitalist class, but to purge the "five poisons" among law-breaking capitalist elements' ²³¹.

A reminder to workers of the need to respect capitalists' property rights, right to manage, and right to hire and fire within the limits of the law ²³² strengthens the impression that the authorities were anxious to curb a movement which was beginning to get out of hand. If we remember that as of the end of 1952, the DRM was reported to have had no effect in

226 Ong Shao-erh, *Labor Problems in Communist China* (to February 1953), 37.

227 Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 116.

228 'Consolidate and develop the victories gained...', *Current Background* 187, 5.

229 '4th session of 4th Conference...', *Current Background* 187, 2.

230 See for example Xinhua News Agency (Canton) 18.6.52, '4th All-Circle Representative Conference held in Canton', in *Current Background* 187, 9; 'Consolidate and develop the victories gained...', *Current Background* 187, 5.

231 '4th session of 4th Conference...', *Current Background* 187, 3.

232 Ibid., 4.

private enterprises in Guangzhou, so that management democratization and workers' participation in the running of their enterprises cannot have made much progress in these plants since liberation three years before, it is easy to understand the strength of feeling among workers which must have been unleashed by this first genuinely successful mass mobilization of workers against capitalist employers. It was in fact the sort of reaction from workers which had been feared at the launch of the DRM, but which had not materialized as the movement stagnated with little mass involvement on the part of workers. Anti-capitalist feelings among workers during the Five-Anti movement seem to have reached a point where virtually no-one in an enterprise was prepared to act as an agent of the private management 'for fear of being considered to be serving the interests of the capitalists' ²³³. Workers had to be reminded that as long as capitalists ran their enterprises lawfully and in a way which benefitted the state and the people, 'serving such capitalists would not conflict with [their] desire to serve the people.' ²³⁴

During 1952 the conduct and progress of the Three- and Five-anti campaigns in urban areas in Guangdong and the land reform movement in the countryside became caught up in a major rectification of the province's Party and government leadership. ²³⁵ In October of that year Tao Zhu (officially Fourth Secretary of the Party's south China sub-bureau, but actually *de facto* First Secretary of the Guangdong Party from this time on), assessed the progress of the various movements underway in the province, and concluded that although the unemployment resulting from the disruptive effects of the

233 '4th session of 4th Conference...', *Current Background* 187, 7.

234 Ibid., 7.

235 For an account of these events, see Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, 116-124.

Five-Anti movement had been 'successfully tackled' ²³⁶, at least in the city of Guangzhou itself, it was still necessary to conduct a re-examination of the results of the Three-Anti movement and to reorganize the Party in the province.

Although the crisis which necessitated changes in the provincial Party leadership and that of the city of Guangzhou mainly centred on the issues of the slow progress of land reform and the conflicts between cadres native to Guangdong province and those from north China, criticisms of the old leadership put forward during the first half of 1953 show the effects on industry and on workers of the defects identified in Party leadership. He Wei, a newcomer to the province who had been First Secretary of the CCP in Guangzhou since the middle of 1952 and mayor of the city since December of that year ²³⁷, summed up these criticisms of the city's leadership since liberation in an article published in *Guangzhou Ribao* in April 1953. ²³⁸ In the article he identified the mistakes which had been made as basically constituting 'a rightist tendency' ²³⁹, and condemned the 'lack of humility, lack of democracy, patriarchal leadership, formalism, and all kinds and forms of bureaucratism in work style' ²⁴⁰ which had been exhibited by the leadership. He claimed that local conditions were poorly understood, bureaucratism was widespread, mass consciousness was 'still at a very low level', the political superiority of the masses had yet to be 'genuinely

236 Tao Zhu, 'The present situation in Guangdong and our tasks and missions', *Nanfang Ribao* 28.10.52, in *Current Background* 187, 7.

237 Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, 119.

238 He Wei, 'Experiences and lessons from the review of Party leadership in Canton for the past three years', *Guangzhou Ribao* 21.4.53, in *Current Background* 253, 4-16.

239 Ibid., 9.

240 Ibid., 4.

established', and understanding of Party policy was 'inadequate'. ²⁴¹

Behind all these errors and deviations, He found an absence of any understanding of 'the mass viewpoint and the production viewpoint' ²⁴², a failure to rely on the masses, and a strong tendency towards petty-bourgeois individualism on the part of the city's leadership. If we look at some of the more detailed comments made by He about the way in which cadres in enterprise leadership manifested these faults, we begin to see why institutions such as the FMC had often failed to go beyond a formalistic existence, why the DRM had stagnated in many enterprises, and why the Three-Anti movement, led by these same cadres, had been unable to achieve the aim of reforming their bureaucratist style of work.

In his report, He painted a picture of the sort of cadre who views any success in work as his own personal achievement, and who obeys high-level orders mechanically without regard for the actual situation in his enterprise and concentrates on pleasing his superiors.

He seldom bothers to see whether the work done is of any real good to the masses, or what the reactions of the masses are to the work. As a result, he cannot assume a democratic work-style, and can only proceed with his work and with his treatment of the masses in an attitude of bureaucratism and commandism. ²⁴³

He also criticised factory directors who hardly ever showed their faces on the shop floor, 'and even on the occasions they did pay visits, they just rushed through the place and failed

241 Ibid., 7.

242 Ibid., 7.

243 Ibid., 11.

to solve concretely the problems which were present.' ²⁴⁴
Such a cadre, according to He,

does not serve the people honestly [or] do a good job of [running] the enterprises owned by the masses. Instead he is there as a 'bureaucrat', the 'superior' of the masses, and he wants the cadres and masses to work for his personal honor and position. ²⁴⁵

In the light of the usual official denial that the difference in status between workers and leading cadres in an enterprise amounts to anything more than a simple division of labour, this charge that factory directors were acting like old-style bureaucrats and saw themselves as the workers' superiors was a particularly serious one.

Of course, He's highly critical account of the Guangzhou leadership posed the question of how such serious mistakes could go uncorrected for three whole years, especially as there had apparently been 'many complaints from the workers.' ²⁴⁶ He admitted that the city's leadership (in which he included himself) had 'made a mess of the good tasks' ²⁴⁷ entrusted to them by the Party and by the people, and that bureaucratism was serious 'in the leadership of all levels in the Party, administrative, labor and mass organs of Canton city. Also universal and serious are the phenomena of commandism and the abuse of the lower ranks.' ²⁴⁸ Coupled with a 'lack of interest in the sufferings of the

244 Ibid., 10.

245 Ibid., 11.

246 Ibid., 10.

247 Ibid., 10.

248 Ibid., 10.

masses' ²⁴⁹, how could such conduct have persisted for so long?

He characterized the situation in the municipal Party Committee as 'very abnormal', with an 'atmosphere of a lack of principles' and a tendency towards complacency, where many cadres 'not only fear[ed] criticism and self-criticism, but even suppress[ed] democracy and suppress[ed] criticism' ²⁵⁰, allowing them to continue in their old ways. This accusation is supported by other press accounts at this time which revealed that the leadership's critics, including reporters on the *Nanfang Ribao*, had been intimidated into silence. Reprisals against reporters were said to have been common, with those attempting to expose defects in leadership work labelled as 'unorganized and undisciplined', forced to make self-criticisms, and accused of having 'political problems' and even of plotting to overthrow the Party. ²⁵¹ Reporters were urged to have the courage to expose this sort of conduct in future, and assured of the leadership's support if they did so. ²⁵² He ended his report with a reminder of the vital importance to democratic life of criticism and self-criticism, 'particularly from the lower ranks leading up to the higher ranks.' ²⁵³

He's harsh verdict on the achievements of the Guangzhou city leadership since liberation was accompanied by a re-evaluation of both the Three- and Five-Anti movements. He remarked that in industrial and commercial work there had been

249 Ibid., 10.

250 Ibid., 13.

251 *Nanfang Ribao* 13.2.53, 1.

252 Ibid., 1.

253 'Experiences and lessons ...', *Guangzhou Ribao* 21.4.53, in *Current Background* 253, 14.

no adequate struggle against certain law-violating capitalists, and there was accommodation and concession to a great degree. Accordingly, certain commercial capitalists in Canton still did not assume an honest attitude even after the Five-Anti movement, and this produced bad influences on other areas. ²⁵⁴

The *Nanfang Ribao* reported in November 1953 that the 'five poisons' were still being committed by some capitalists, and problems with corruption of union cadres by capitalists also seem to have persisted. A survey of union cadres on a training course in Guangzhou more than a year later found that almost ninety per cent of them admitted having assisted capitalist employers in cheating the state in various ways, or having known about such conduct without doing anything about it. ²⁵⁵

The original verdict on the success of the Three-Anti movement was also revised considerably. In June 1952 it had been announced that in the course of the movement,

loopholes of corruption and waste in [official] organs had been stopped, bureaucratic errors had been overcome, working efficiency had been heightened, and a simple, austere, self-effacing, and public-minded style of work that truly serves the people [had been established]. ²⁵⁶

254 Ibid., 9.

255 *Gongren Ribao* 11.3.55, 1, 'We must maintain the purity of trade unions in private enterprises'. Of the 202 cadres, 52 chaired their enterprise union, while 152 were committee members. 179 admitted assisting capitalists or turning a blind eye to their misdeeds.

256 *Nanfang Ribao* 15.6.52, '4th session of 4th Conference...', *Current Background* 187, 2.

But He's catalogue of leadership errors and deviations made it clear that little if any of this was true. Early in 1952 it was admitted that bureaucratism and commandism were still serious in many organs, and were alienating the masses; some cadres referred to the Three-Anti as 'only the "Two and a half Anti" or the "Two Anti", or even the "One Anti" - only opposing corruption'.²⁵⁷ Consequently a twelve-day meeting to re-examine the results of the movement took place in March and April of 1953. After what was reportedly some 'very spirited'²⁵⁸ debate, it was announced that the meeting had 'laid down a good beginning for the future development of the struggle against bureaucratism, commandism, and violations of law and discipline'²⁵⁹, a statement which comes very close to admitting that the original Three-Anti movement, which had after all been intended to tackle precisely these problems, had failed completely.

The first half of 1953 saw an anti-bureaucratism campaign which was in effect an extension of the Three-Anti movement, as well as the final completion in Guangzhou's private industrial sector of the long-postponed DRM.²⁶⁰ Yet the emphasis during this period was not on management democratization and the promotion of workers' participation in management, the original aims of both of these movements; the anti-bureaucratism campaign was aimed at the Party and state bureaucracy rather than basic-level cadres in enterprises.²⁶¹ Within enterprises, a strong emphasis on

257 *Nanfang Ribao* 13.2.53, 3.

258 Guangzhou Ribao, 21.4.53, Canton leadership for past three years reviewed in meeting of senior cadres, in Current Background 253, 30.7.53, 3.

259 *Ibid.*, 3.

260 *Nanfang Ribao* 27.8.53, 2, 'Democratic reform in Guangzhou's private enterprises reaches victorious conclusion'.

261 *Nanfang Ribao* 11.2.53, 1.

discipline and a shift in workers' activism from politics to production became evident.²⁶² Workers were constantly reminded of their responsibilities in production, and were warned that violations of discipline were incompatible with their status as 'masters of the enterprise'.²⁶³

This tendency was reinforced by the effects of the Seventh ACFTU Congress held in May 1953, at which unions were criticized for having paid far too much attention to welfare and to supporting workers' 'excessive' demands in the past, at the expense of their duties in production. All unions were now reminded that production was their central task, even in private enterprises, where it was not for the sole benefit of capitalists and their profits, but was vital to the national economy and to workers' own long-term interests.²⁶⁴ Although only a few months earlier the persistence of bureaucratism in the unions had still appeared to be a cause for concern, with the absence of democratic life within them and the failure to hold elections and to report back to the WRC specifically mentioned²⁶⁵, workers' continued dissatisfaction with their unions seems subsequently to have been put to one side as all attention was directed towards production.

The criticism of unions at the Seventh Congress was of course aimed at the economist and syndicalist tendencies which some of them had displayed during 1951. But time had not stood still for the unions since then, and we must also

262 *Nanfang Ribao* 3.2.53, 2; 27.8.53, 2; 28.8.53, 5.

263 *Nanfang Ribao* 28.8.53, 5, 'The masters' ideology of the working class'.

264 *Nanfang Ribao* 31.5.53, 1, 'Guangzhou's representatives to the 7th National Representative Congress of Chinese Trade Unions pass on the Congress's decisions to Guangzhou's working masses'. See also 25.4.53, 1 and 2, and 19.5.53, 2, for similar comments on union work and production.

265 *Nanfang Ribao* 27.2.53, 1.

consider what impact the criticism was intended to have in the light of other events, such as unions' activities during the Five-Anti campaign. It seems likely that the down-playing of unions' political activities in favour of their central task of production was also a measure designed to bring to a decisive end the struggle of workers and unions against capitalists in private enterprises, a struggle which, as we saw, had at times threatened to escalate out of control and which in some cases adversely affected production. It was now firmly denied that workers in private enterprises were 'only half masters' ²⁶⁶, and they were discouraged from further attempts to enlarge their power within the enterprise.

Although it is true that the Five-Anti movement 'was designed to increase the power and participation of workers in management' ²⁶⁷, this increase in participation was not promoted purely for its own sake, or even primarily as a response to workers' demands; had this been the case, one would have expected to see a further expansion of participation once enterprises were taken into state ownership in 1955-56, whereas in fact the role of workers and unions in management was curtailed once enterprises were nationalized or socialized. More will be said about this in the next section. The involvement of workers and the leadership of the Five-Anti campaign by unions in enterprises should be seen in the context of general Party policy towards industry. While the influence exercised by workers and unions definitely increased as a result of the campaign, 'the primary purpose of the mobilization of workers into management in private enterprises by unions was for the ultimate nationalization of the economy.' ²⁶⁸ After nationalization, production would be

266 Nanfang Ribao 28.8.53, 5, 'The masters' ideology of the working class'.

267 Stephen Andors, *China's Industrial Revolution: Politics, planning and management, 1949 to the present*, 52.

268 Lee Lai To, Trade Unions in China, 1949-, 99.

their central task and great emphasis would be placed on discipline and obedience to Party and administrative leadership, as was already the case in state enterprises.

In 1954 a *Renmin Ribao* article on labour discipline set out the new line, advocating enforceable rules and regulations as a guarantee of order and discipline in the enterprise (rather than relying on education and group pressure), something which had hitherto been regarded as the 'working style of warlords'.²⁶⁹ It was now claimed that 'what threatens the normal progress of production and affects the labour activism of the masses is not that discipline is too strict but that it is too slack.'²⁷⁰ Along with this renewed emphasis on obedience rather than activism, 'the growth of a planning system restricted [workers'] participation to matters of detail'²⁷¹, while there was a growing tendency for management 'to take increased production as the sole success indicator'²⁷², subordinating issues of democracy and participation to the goal of fulfilling state production plans.

From 1953, the first year of the PRC's First Five-Year Plan, until about the middle of 1956, there was a strong emphasis on centralized national planning in industry and on the Soviet system of one-man management, a strictly hierarchical system of management with the enterprise director at its apex. Although this system was never introduced in all sectors or in all areas of the country²⁷³, and was

269 *Renmin Ribao* 6.6.54, quoted in Brugger, *Democracy and organization*, 117.

270 *Ibid.*, 118.

271 *Ibid.*, 137.

272 *Ibid.*, 138.

273 See the discussion in Peter Nan-shong Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform in China, 1949-1984*, 29-32.

officially repudiated and replaced in 1956 with the factory director responsibility system under the leadership of the enterprise Party committee, its appearance in China at this time was in keeping with the changed emphasis in enterprise management. In this period, '[t]he management-worker split grew wider from the control system and the realities of decision-making.' ²⁷⁴

The new atmosphere also affected the work of the official trade unions: Brugger notes 'an increasing tendency to relate everything to matters of production' ²⁷⁵ in union work as well as in management. The unions' role was reduced to that of a one-way transmission belt, passing on production plans and the instructions of management to the workers but not carrying any feedback in the opposite direction. Structures for workers' participation such as the FMC and WRC, which as we have seen were of limited effectiveness even when initially introduced, also declined further under the new system, with the tendency to use the WRC 'to instruct workers' ²⁷⁶ reinforced by one-man management, and the role of the FMC much reduced. Brugger finds few mentions of the existence of FMCs after the end of the Three- and Five-Anti movements, and concludes that 'their very existence could not be reconciled with one-man management forms of organization.' ²⁷⁷ The new emphasis on labour discipline and production seems to have been successful in bringing about a temporary suspension of the conflict between workers and the Party which had been unfolding since liberation.

274 Andors, China's industrial revolution, 57.

275 Brugger, Democracy and organization, 247.

276 Lee Lai To, The structure of the trade union system in China, 1949-66, 30.

277 Brugger, Democracy and organization, 249-50.

Conclusions

If we trace the outlines of this first confrontation between workers and the CCP, we find that it had its roots in the moderate policy for the takeover of industry in later liberated cities such as Guangzhou, which conflicted with workers' expectations that after liberation, their theoretical position as 'masters of the enterprise' would soon become a reality in the enterprise, as institutions for democratic management were established and new trade unions were organized which were to be run by the workers themselves. But the Party enforced the policy of 'maintaining the status quo' in the enterprises it took over, rather than allowing workers to take over management themselves, and reacted to what it considered to be ultraleftism or 'extreme democratization' on the part of workers immediately after liberation, in some cases supported by unions, by imposing a policy which subordinated workers' demands to the imperatives of economic recovery and stability. The CCP insisted that there was no need for a mass movement to reform enterprise management in the direction of greater democracy and participation by workers, in direct contradiction to many workers' own demands. A combination of Party pressure and the unions' own weaknesses (the lack of strong links with their members and a clear understanding of their proper stance under a socialist government), led them to adopt the attitude of always siding with the administration against workers' demands in both state and private enterprises.

Workers' criticism and protests against this state of affairs mounted through the spring of 1950, prompting a union rectification movement during the second half of the year and a renewed emphasis on management democratization, which, it was admitted, had made little progress since liberation. Subsequent developments, including the Democratic Reform Movement and the Three- and Five-Anti movements, can be understood as attempts by the Party to make the radical

democratic reforms of enterprise management which it felt were necessary, but without conceding all of workers' demands or unleashing any mass movement in industrial enterprises which might lead workers to renew their collective efforts for 'extreme democratization'. From the beginning of 1951, workers had more support in the enterprise from the unions, who were later criticized for their economist and syndicalist tendencies during this period, but union organizations were still plagued with the same problems of bureaucratism and the lack of internal democracy which had marked them from the beginning, so the real value of this new union line to workers in their attempts to assert their rights in the enterprise is doubtful.

The Democratic Reform Movement achieved its aims in only a few industrial sectors during 1951, generally foundering on enterprise leaderships' reluctance to mobilize workers for fear that they might widen the scope of the movement to include technical and managerial authorities in the enterprise as well as 'feudal remnants'. The stagnation of the movement left workers disillusioned about the prospects of a genuinely powerful role for them in enterprise management, but the Three- and Five-Anti movements were somewhat more successful in tackling the attitudes among cadres which had so far hindered the progress of democratization. In the Five-Anti movement in particular, workers were finally mobilized against the numerous capitalist employers who had remained in business after liberation, and who had benefitted from earlier, moderate policies towards capital which had apparently placed few restrictions on their ability to hire and fire workers and run enterprises as they pleased. During the movement, workers were able to establish their right to supervise private management, but their activities were curtailed as the campaign threatened to get out of hand, and both workers and unions were subsequently brought back under tight control in private as in state enterprises, with a strong emphasis on discipline and production as the country strengthened central

planning mechanisms and prepared for its First Five-Year Plan.

By mid-1953, then, workers' original demands for the concrete establishment of their theoretical position as masters of the enterprise had been met only partly in the remaining private enterprises, where production was still declared the main task of both unions and workers, with political considerations, such as the improvement of the rather weak mechanisms for democratic consultation of workers by management, taking second place. In state enterprises, workers' position was little better, and may even have been worse, since management there was appointed by the state which in turn was led by the working class, making a strong role for workers and their union representatives in management appear redundant. The nationalization of the remaining private enterprises in Guangzhou during 1956 brought this problem home to large numbers of workers, who found themselves at an unexpected disadvantage under state or joint state-private management with regard to participation in management as well as wages and conditions.

Workers' response to the thwarting of their aspirations to run their own enterprises in this early period does not seem to have extended to organizing themselves in opposition to management or the Party, but judging from press accounts and official reports, it did include often harsh criticism of leading cadres which could not safely be ignored. Workers' alienation from enterprise leadership is frequently mentioned, and there are references to strikes, although these are blamed on agitation by 'feudal remnants'. However, this first confrontation between workers and the Party left a legacy of dissatisfaction among workers and unresolved problems regarding the implementation of democratic management which would also form the basis of the second major confrontation in 1956-7.

It might be argued that some degree of conflict in the

years immediately following liberation was inevitable, as workers, unions, enterprise management and the Party explored the limits of their respective roles under the new regime and reached some sort of *modus vivendi* in the enterprise. The ambiguities of the official trade unions' role, in particular, would mean that they could not be expected to make a smooth, swift transition to a means of operation which would be equally acceptable to them, to their members, and to their Party superiors. But once the various movements for democratization launched by the Party had been carried through, even if they did not go as far as some workers would have wished, conflict could be minimized and the attention of all parties turned towards the tasks of modernization and industrialization.

But conflict between workers and the Party not only broke out again a few years later, as the First Five-Year Plan neared its end, but did so in a way which bore striking similarities to this early period of confrontation. Once again in 1956-7, unions' failure to protect workers' rights and interests and dissatisfaction with severely limited management democratization provoked protests among workers to which the authorities had to respond. But on this occasion workers did not stop at criticizing union, administrative and Party cadres for their attitudes, but bypassed the official unions and organized themselves to force concessions from enterprise authorities. There was even talk of organizing fully independent trade unions. And once again, unions were forced by workers' criticism and rejection of them to switch from acting on behalf of management in controlling workers, to siding with workers and attempting to gain more autonomy for themselves from the Party, resulting in accusations of economism and syndicalism, rectification campaigns, and a purge of union leadership. There are also parallels in the Party's reaction to workers' protests during this second confrontation, as moves to accommodate workers' demands and accept their criticisms resulted in a further escalation of

those protests, and eventually necessitated a crackdown by the Party when the challenge to its authority was perceived to have gone beyond what could be tolerated. In the next section we will see how workers' criticisms of unions, the Party and the administration in 1956-7 closely mirrored those made in the first few years after liberation, pointing to serious and possibly irresolvable problems in the relationship between workers and the Party.

SECTION TWO

CONTRADICTIONS AMONG THE PEOPLE

There are clear similarities between the first major confrontation between workers and the CCP and the second, which developed during 1956 and 1957. As we saw at the end of the last section, the post-liberation conflict developed as workers' demands that they should genuinely act as the masters of democratically-managed enterprises clashed with the Party's fears of 'extreme democratization'. This conflict was shelved in 1953, in favour of renewed concentration on the development of industrial production, but was not resolved. Although workers and unions in private enterprises were able to exercise some influence over management after the Five-Anti movement, once those enterprises were taken into state or joint state-private ownership at the beginning of 1956 they found themselves in the same situation as workers in older state enterprises. Institutions for democratic management such as the FMC and WRC had long since lost what little influence they had, and the official unions were unsure of their role vis-à-vis the state administration and reluctant to challenge it even when its actions seemed to infringe upon workers' interests, leaving workers no legitimate means of protecting their interests and exerting influence over the running of the enterprise. The main underlying conflict in workers' relationship with the CCP thus remained in existence.

Elements common to both confrontations include weak, demoralized and undemocratic trade unions which were constantly criticized and finally rejected by their members, participatory institutions for workers which ultimately depended on the goodwill and cooperation of management for

their efficacy, and a tendency on the part of the CCP to point to deficiencies in the implementation of policies rather than the nature of the policies themselves as the root cause of mounting discontent among workers. The Party's response to criticism of undemocratic management during 1956, the promotion of the workers' congress (zhigong daibiao dahui), marks a similar shift in policy to the one we saw in 1950, as it was acknowledged that workers' protests that enterprise leadership had moved too far in the direction of discipline and control had some basis in fact, and the pendulum swung back towards democracy and participation in management.

This second confrontation, however, seems to have revealed a more serious division between workers and the CCP and to have been more difficult to keep under any sort of control than the first. There are a number of reasons for this, not least the fact that this was the second time that workers had been roused to protest at the leadership's treatment of them, and having been unsuccessful in their first challenge to Party policy, they were now inclined to go further in their protests and to take more direct action in pressing their demands to avoid a similarly unsatisfactory outcome this time. Added to this, it was now seven years since liberation, and workers were much less inclined to be patient and to trust the Party's assurances that all the sacrifices made now were necessary to guarantee future prosperity. It is also probable that the Party, whose own cadres enjoyed certain very visible privileges over the workers they controlled (favourable treatment in housing allocation, for example), was starting to lose the moral authority to demand frugality and self-reliance from workers. A change in attitude along these lines is clearly discernible in some of the letters from workers published in the *Guangzhou Ribao* between April and June 1957 during the debate on Wang Cai's ideas, about which more will be said later.¹

1 See for example *Guangzhou Ribao* 13.4.57, 19.5.57.

A number of other political, social and economic factors combined to make the years 1956 and 1957 a watershed for Chinese workers, and helped to precipitate the second confrontation. Prior to the nationalization of the remaining private enterprises in January 1956, the CCP whipped up enthusiasm for the change with a strong emphasis on the material benefits it would bring for workers in terms of wages and welfare provision, raising expectations which were subsequently ignored in a drive for increased production. The forced pace of industrialization in 1956, the penultimate year of the First Five-Year Plan, to some Soviet sinologists 'stands out ... for policies inimical to the interests of workers'², as 'the call for efficiency and productivity tended to intensify industrial work, ... placing additional strains on industrial workers'.³ Given these priorities, workers' welfare and even safety tended to be ignored, as we shall see. Coupled with the further weakening of enterprise democracy which occurred once private enterprises were taken over, this created a mood of bitterness and disillusionment among workers which fuelled increasingly frequent bouts of industrial unrest.

The conduct and results of the comprehensive national wage reform programme carried out between April and October 1956 further worsened relations in the enterprise, and the whole direction of wage and other policies, with their emphasis on piece-work, frequent raising of norms, and material incentives as a spur to productivity, contributed to a change in many workers' attitudes towards enterprise leadership and towards their own labour. The most striking thing which emerges from newspaper articles, and particularly from workers' letters to the press, at this time is the extent to which workers seem to have regarded the leadership of their

2 See Gilbert Rozman, *A mirror for socialism - Soviet criticisms of China*, 113.

3 Peter Nan-shong Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform in China, 1949-1984*, 40.

enterprises as adversaries, and to have adopted the methods of the withdrawal or selective application of their labour to gain concessions and the reversal of unacceptable decisions.⁴ It was frequently argued by workers that unless they took this sort of action their views and demands would continue to be ignored by the leadership and problems would go unsolved, and many even recommended creating disturbances (chaonao) as the only effective means of influencing enterprise authorities, claiming that workers had to stand up for themselves in this way against leaders who 'bullied the good, but feared the bad.'⁵ It should be noted that workers never mentioned the official unions in this context, having already come to the conclusion that they were useless in the event of a dispute with the enterprise leadership.

Some workers also adopted the slogan of 'work according to payment' (an chou fu lao, a pun on Marx's 'to each according to his work', or an lao fu chou; payment according to work was the cardinal principle of the 1956 wage reform). This meant that they refused to do work of a higher grade than that to which they had been assigned during wage reform, or refused to work overtime. Many of the workers who advocated these tactics admitted that they really belonged to the capitalist era of wage relations⁶ and were not suited to workers' role as masters of the enterprise under socialism, but they nevertheless defended them as necessary given the bureaucratist and undemocratic nature of many enterprise leaderships. This comes very close to accusing these leaders of behaving like the capitalist employers of the old society, showing the seriousness of the split which was developing between leaders and led in the industrial sphere.

4 See for example *Guangzhou Ribao* 10.5.57, 2, and 24.5.57, 2; *Nanfang Ribao* 19.5.57, 1; *Gongren Ribao* 25.4.57, 1, and 30.4.57, 2.

5 *Guangzhou Ribao* 19.5.57, 2; 21.5.57, 2.

6 *Guangzhou Ribao* 3.5.57, 2; 8.5.57, 2.

The movement to 'let a hundred flowers bloom, and a hundred schools of thought contend' had little effect when first launched by Mao in May 1956, as few responded to his invitation to speak out freely, but it gained momentum the following spring after his February 27 speech, 'On the correct handling of contradictions among the people'. Contradictions within the ranks of the people, rather than between the people and its enemies, were identified as the main source of conflict in Chinese society now that acute, mass class struggle had basically come to an end, and these non-antagonistic contradictions were to be resolved by peaceful methods such as debate and criticism and self-criticism. After the launching of a Party rectification movement in March 1957, particular importance was attached to criticism of the higher levels by the grassroots.

It is not usually emphasized that Mao's report on contradictions within the people was prompted at least as much by the industrial unrest of 1956 and early 1957 as by intellectual agitation and discontent among the peasantry. However, given the seriousness of the conflict between workers and their leaders as outlined above, it should not surprise us that this was a major cause of concern. François Gipouloux has pointed out that Mao's report contains frequent references to 'various trade union reports'⁷ and quotes workers' angry criticism of administrative cadres as contained in an internal ACFTU report. One particular remark noted in the ACFTU report and quoted by Mao must have set alarm bells ringing among the Chinese leadership: some workers had apparently expressed the opinion that in their disputes with the enterprise administration, 'if you don't learn from Hungary, you won't get anything.'⁸

The possibility that the sort of popular protest and

7 Ibid., 191.

8 *Zhongguo Gongyun* 2, 1957, quoted in Gipouloux, 191.

revolt which had occurred in Poland and Hungary during 1956 might be repeated in China was something which the Chinese leadership took extremely seriously; they had, after all, just experienced a wave of industrial unrest at the enterprise level during 1956. Knowledge of the events in Eastern Europe was undoubtedly a further motive for the policy of (limited) liberalization and democratization and increased scope for criticism of the Party which took shape during 1956 and the first half of 1957, particularly as it related to workers. It is interesting to note also that at least some workers were themselves aware of the events elsewhere in the socialist camp and were keen to adopt the same methods as their East European counterparts: the comment about learning from Hungary is a further example of the sort of attitude we found expressed by Guangzhou's workers earlier, namely that unless workers caused trouble and stood up for themselves against the leadership, they would continue to be ignored.

Articles in the Chinese press on the Hungarian Incident, in particular, show Chinese awareness of the similarities between the conditions which had given rise to the rebellion in Hungary and those created during the course of the First Five-Year Plan in China. It was noted that in Hungary,

some Party leaders in their work failed conscientiously to rely on the masses and mobilize the masses, and did not have sufficient concern for the masses, ... with regard to improving the people's livelihood, they did not adopt effective measures; workers' real wages increased very little ... [These mistakes] greatly damaged links between the Party and the masses, restricted the people's democratic rights and hindered improvements in their standard of living.⁹

⁹ Yi Han, 'How to understand the Hungarian Incident', *Zhongguo Gongren* 22, November 1956, 8.

This is very similar to Chinese accounts of how the institutions of democratic management had over the years degenerated into formalism, as the leadership became complacent and 'did not care about the masses, did not respect the masses' opinions, did not solve difficulties which could have been solved...' ¹⁰, leading workers to become 'sceptical, negative, disappointed, and even dissatisfied.' ¹¹ It also reflects the same problems in the relationship between workers and their leaders which gave rise to the first confrontation in China after liberation.

It is interesting that, while condemning the 'counterrevolutionary elements' who took advantage of it to launch their attempt to overthrow the socialist government, the author of this article on Hungary regards the original mass demonstration in Budapest as 'just' in its intention 'to demand that the Party and government strengthen and broaden democracy and further improve livelihoods'. ¹² This reflects the official view in China during the Hundred Flowers period that valid criticism of the leadership by the led not only should not be suppressed, but should be welcomed as an aid to improving workstyle. Similarly, if people had to resort to the methods of strikes and demonstrations to make their views known, this was a sign not of incipient counterrevolution (although opportunists might seek to push it in that direction), but of a failure on the part of the leadership to observe the usual principles of democratic life and criticism and self-criticism which ought to be corrected.

As an alternative to intensified repression of unrest, which might only lead to a more devastating explosion in the

10 Li Chun, 'Why democracy must be broadened in enterprise management', *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, March 1957, 3.

11 Ibid., 4.

12 'How to understand the Hungarian Incident', *Zhongguo Gongren* 22, November 1956, 8.

long run, Chinese leaders saw an opportunity to establish, or re-establish, institutions for democratic participation which they hoped would provide a relatively safe outlet for the discontent which had built up among workers. If the workers' congress could be made to operate in such a way as to satisfy workers' desire for greater participation in management and more control over their working lives, workers would be far less likely either to set up their own independent organizations outside Party control or to link up with discontented groups beyond their own enterprises in larger-scale collective action, both of which the Chinese leadership, with the examples of Poland and Hungary before them, were anxious to prevent.

If we look specifically at the diagnoses of the root cause of the unrest and at the preferred solutions put forward by the ruling parties in Poland and Hungary with regard to workers, the parallels with the Chinese situation are even more striking. The Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP), committing itself to democratization in response to the unrest, declared that

a decisive part ... must be played by widening the workers' democracy, by increasing the direct participation of workers in the management of enterprises, [and] by increasing the part played by the working masses in governing all sectors of the country's life.¹³

Calls for workplace democratization and increased worker participation in management featured in many statements by the

13 *Trybuna Ludu*, 24.10.56, 'Letter from the First Secretary of the PUWP, Gomulka, to the workers and youth, October 23, 1956', in Paul Zinner, *National communism and popular revolt in Eastern Europe - a selection of documents on events in Poland and Hungary, February-November, 1956*, 266. Similar statements by Gomulka appear in other documents in this collection, for example 272-3, 285.

ACFTU Chair Lai Ruoyu during 1956 and 1957, and his proposals for the system of workers' congresses were broadly accepted by the Chinese leadership. The Hungarian Workers' Party took a similar line, noting that

The social activity of the working class and the working masses has increased significantly in the past few months ... The interest of the workers has increased in the affairs of the enterprises, public life, and international events. ¹⁴

It was also evident that Hungarian trade unions had been suffering from the same problems of lack of authority and respect in the enterprise, and from workers' lack of confidence in their own mass organizations, as had their Chinese counterparts: 'the belittling of the trade unions and trade union work ... quite frequently observable' ¹⁵ in Hungary also loomed large in the trade union press in China throughout 1956 and the first half of 1957. And just as in China there were calls for the reinvigoration of the enterprise trade union role as the standing organ of the workers' congress, and thus a vital component in the structure of democratic management, in Hungary it was asserted that

Growing democracy in the factories and places of work requires the inclusion of trade union organs in discussions on problems of management and economic organization to a much greater extent than before. ¹⁶

14 Szabad Nep, 23.5.56, 'With Party unity for a socialist democracy - Resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers Party, July 18-21, 1956', in *ibid.*, 352.

15 *Ibid.*, 366.

16 *Ibid.*, 366-7.

Given the example of the events in Hungary, and in particular of the widespread formation there of workers' councils to run enterprises, which the Central Council of Trade Unions hailed as '[the completion of] the process of taking over factories as the property of the people'¹⁷, the weakness of the official trade unions in China combined with the growing assertiveness of many workers was a special cause of concern. The trade union press of 1956 abounds with incidents in which individual workers with grievances found their enterprise trade union either unwilling (at the higher level) or unable (at the lower level) to help them resolve their difficulties, and so went over the heads of the trade union directly to leading administrative cadres, whereupon the problem was solved on the spot.¹⁸ This growing tendency to bypass the trade union took on a new dimension as the industrial unrest of 1956 gained momentum. The official unions, as we have already mentioned, played no role in these disputes.

The first decision of the strikers ... was to do without the trade union and to elect their own representatives. The workers won when they addressed themselves directly to the political authorities to assert their rights, going over the heads of their inconsistent intermediaries.¹⁹

The same phenomenon was observed in 1957, when Li Xiuren, the deputy head of the ACFTU General Office, said that all the labour disputes which had come to his attention on his '8,000

17 Presidium of the National Council of Trade Unions, 'Appeal by the Central Council of Trade Unions on the elections of workers' councils, October 27, 1956' in *ibid.*, 422.

18 See in particular the series of articles in *Zhongguo Gongren* 15, 18-22 and 24 (August-December 1956), under the general title 'How can trade union activists do a good job in the trade union work they've taken upon themselves?'

19 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 210.

li tour' along the Beijing-Wuhan-Guangzhou railway line 'had one thing in common: trade unions were cast aside.' ²⁰ The ACFTU head Lai Ruoyu similarly acknowledged that 'if a trade union is estranged from the masses, when they make trouble, they [will] abandon their trade union and form another organization of their own.' ²¹

With this sort of self-organization by workers becoming such a common feature of conflict in Chinese enterprises, there arose the possibility that it might go beyond the formation of ad hoc strike committees and delegations to higher-level organs and extend to the organizing of independent trade unions. Indeed, it was revealed after the launch of the anti-rightist campaign that 'some people [had] even proposed the organization of so-called "free trade unions"' ²², while an ACFTU official, Gao Yuan, reminded workers and union cadres alike that workers had the right under the Trade Union Law to organize their own unions outside ACFTU auspices if they wished; he was severely criticized for this and other views during the anti-rightist campaign in the second half of 1957. ²³

The reasons why there was in fact no widespread formation of independent unions in China at this time will be discussed later. For the present, we should note that self-organization by workers in this period went much further and was a cause of much greater concern to the authorities than was the case during the first confrontation. With these informal and generally short-lived forms of organization proliferating at

20 'On an 8,000 li tour of hurried observation', *Renmin Ribao*, 9.5.57, in *SCMP* 1551, 17.6.57, 10.

21 *Gongren Ribao*, 9.5.57, 'How contradictions within the ranks of the people are handled by the trade unions', in *SCMP* 1535, 22.5.57, 9.

22 'Rightist elements' secret plot to usurp the trade unions', *Zhongguo Gongren* 16, August 1957, 3.

23 See *Gongren Ribao* 22.10.57, 1; 12.11.57, 3; 19.11.57, 2.

the enterprise level, proposals for fully independent unions were made, and the attempts to attribute these proposals to unspecified rightists who were trying 'to usurp the leadership of the trade unions' ²⁴ from the Party fit in with the general pattern of the anti-rightist campaign, in which a concerted effort was made to dissociate ordinary workers from the unrest of the preceding months and to channel their discontent into criticism of 'rightist' engineers and technicians in the enterprise and intellectuals in general. This should not distract us from the fact that 'workers' statements reached, in June 1957, an explosive degree of radicalism' ²⁵ which conceded nothing to the most radical of the student protests of the Hundred Flowers era. The 'authentically political character' ²⁶ of the action taken by workers in support of their demands should also be recognized; more will be said about this later.

Finally, the significance of the industrial unrest which unfolded during these two years should not be underestimated. The Hundred Flowers movement is commonly portrayed as a movement for liberalization and democratization involving students, intellectuals and the small democratic parties remaining in existence after 1949; if the involvement of workers is mentioned at all, it is in connection with officially orchestrated worker criticism of intellectuals after the launch of the anti-rightist movement. ²⁷ But as we have already seen, growing discontent and protest among workers actually preceded the launch of the movement, and was a major factor influencing Mao in his thinking on the problem

24 Ibid., 3.

25 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 274.

26 Ibid., 274.

27 See for example *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 17.6.57, 'Peking workers challenge Ge Guy', in *SCMP* 1569, 15.7.57, 18; *Renmin Ribao*, 10.6.57, 'Workers start to speak up', in *SCMP* 1553, 19.6.57, 6.

of contradictions among the people which was central to it. And in spite of the general suppression of criticism once the anti-rightist movement had been launched, workers' discontent continued to make itself felt until the end of the year. Gipouloux has found

as late as December [1957] virulent attacks on the state and the administration. This obstinacy and courage is without doubt the authentic expression of labour's taking a political stand with regard to the regime.²⁸

The temporary openness of the Hundred Flowers period did allow much freer reporting in the press of industrial and other disputes, as well as a more honest appraisal of the problems inherent in the relationship between leaders and led, in the enterprise as in wider society, in a socialist state. But it would be wrong to conclude that workers were simply one more group taking advantage of the moderate policy to let off steam and press their own demands; their actions before, during and after the movement show the scale of the crisis in their relations with the Party and government, and indicate that rather than industrial unrest being an episode in the Hundred Flowers movement, the reverse is closer to the truth. The difficulties experienced by the Party in bringing workers' protests to an end testify to the seriousness of this second confrontation, with the effects of the First Five-Year Plan and the influence of the uprisings in Eastern Europe on both workers and the top leadership adding to the tensions which remained from the early, post-liberation period of conflict: the contradiction between workers' demands for further democratization and cadres' fears of 'extreme democratization', and workers' doubts about the extent to which they actually were masters of the state and of their enterprises, given the growing tendency of cadres to

28 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 274.

become separated from the workers and to form a distinct stratum with its own interests and privileges.

1956: The nationalization of industry in Guangzhou

The nationalization, or socialist transformation, of industry and commerce in Guangzhou was perhaps the key event in the city's development during the course of the First Five-Year Plan. As of September 1955, the transformation of the many remaining private enterprises into joint state-private enterprises was projected to take five years to complete; in November, after Mao's speech of October 29 calling for a speed-up in the transformation process, this was revised to two years; and in fact all industrial and commercial enterprises were transformed, on paper at least, by January 20, 1956.²⁹ The term 'joint state-private enterprise' is slightly misleading, for although former capitalists were to continue to receive fixed interest for a specified period (originally seven years) after the takeover of their enterprises, and would in many cases become ordinary employees of the enterprise in a managerial capacity, the enterprise would actually be run by representatives appointed by the state.

Workers seem to have had high expectations of their enterprises after nationalization, especially in terms of improved welfare benefits and living conditions of the sort enjoyed by workers in some older state enterprises; this was indeed the impression they were given in official propaganda about the change. One thing they might not have anticipated, however, was that the transformation of private enterprises would lead to a sharp decrease in workers' opportunities for participation in management and would reduce almost to nothing

29 For an account of this process and the probable motives behind the successive speed-ups, see Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, 156-173.

the influence of the remaining democratic institutions such as the WRC. This should not have come as a complete surprise, since, it will be recalled from the last section, the scope of action allowed to workers and their trade union representatives in private enterprises at the height of the Five-Anti movement was granted not for its own sake, but for a specific reason: 'the primary purpose of the mobilization of workers into management in private enterprises by the unions was for the ultimate nationalization of the economy.'³⁰ Once nationalization was complete there could be no question of any antagonism between workers and state representatives in industry, since it was an article of faith that the long-term interests of the workers were identical to those of the state and were best served by diligence and obedience to state instructions. The implication was that there was no longer any particularly pressing need for workers themselves to participate directly in management since state representatives were already running the enterprise on their behalf.

The decline in democracy and participation in private enterprises after nationalization clearly came as a great disappointment to many workers. Towards the end of 1956 this disappointment was officially acknowledged to be entirely reasonable, since the new joint state-private enterprises had 'neglected the democratic tradition allowing workers in private enterprises to participate in management.'³¹ A *Renmin Ribao* editorial in November of that year deplored the fact that

the greater part of the enterprises brought under state-private ownership failed to carry on as a good tradition the experience of the masses in management.... The machinery of democratic management was done away with ... some state

30 Lee Lai To, *Trade Unions in China, 1949 to the present*, 99.

31 Lai Ruoyu, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing), 23.11.56, in *SCMP* 1422, 3.12.56, 3.

representatives would not consult with the masses ... [and] many workers were doubtful of their position as "master of the enterprise".³²

The article asserted that the democratic tradition 'should not only be carried on but also enlarged upon. The power of the trade unions to exercise supervision [over the administration] should be restored.'³³ This was the thinking behind proposals for management democratization, and specifically for the establishment of the workers' congress with the enterprise trade union committee as its standing organ, which gained widespread acceptance during the second half of 1956.

Workers' expectations that they would benefit materially from the transformation to joint state-private ownership were also disappointed during the course of 1956. Workers in Guangzhou found that in terms of housing, welfare provisions, and in many cases real wages, any improvement in their situation was minimal in spite of the rapid progress made in production. 'Economic activity had seen an unprecedented expansion, but this was not always translated in tangible fashion to the daily life of the worker.'³⁴ One worker, recalling the mood in his factory when joint management was first introduced, clearly expressed workers' subsequent disappointment:

I remember when joint management first came in, when we celebrated our enterprise starting out on the socialist road with a great fanfare, how happy we all were thinking that now we had joint management, we would become the masters of the enterprise, just

32 *Renmin Ribao*, 30.11.56, 'Bring the fighting role of trade unions into play in state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1433, 18.12.56, 4.

33 *Ibid.*, 4.

34 *Gipouloux, Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 165.

like in state enterprises today, and we would go to and from work by bus and have state housing to live in..., but now that we have joint management, the factory's production has increased, but our lives have not only not improved, but are actually worse than before... ³⁵

There was also the issue of cadre privilege: there is evidence that a disproportionate amount of newly constructed housing, for example, was allocated to cadres and their families ³⁶, while factory directors and leading cadres also received larger wage increases than workers in joint state-private enterprises. These issues will be discussed in greater detail later.

The disillusionment and discontent felt by workers at the failure of any significant material improvement in their lives to emerge from nationalization was exacerbated by the fact that, compared to when their enterprises were privately owned, they now had even fewer resources at their disposal with which they might make their grievances known and exercise some influence in the enterprise in defence of their interests. This situation was given a further twist in Guangzhou where so many enterprises remained in private hands until the nationalization of industry and commerce in January 1956. As we saw in the previous section, the new communist regime was anxious to persuade as many former private industrialists and businessmen as possible to stay on in the city after liberation and keep their enterprises open, and resisted workers' demands for immediate expropriation, leaving Guangzhou with a much higher proportion of retained personnel in enterprises than was the case in earlier liberated areas. With the transfer of private enterprises into joint state-

35 *Guangzhou Ribao* 13.4.57, 2.

36 *Gipouloux, Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 183-4. In addition to the sources cited by *Gipouloux*, see also *Guangzhou Ribao* 23.5.57, 2, and 29.5.57, 2.

private management, many of the retained personnel were appointed as factory directors or managers by the state³⁷, thus keeping their old positions of authority while evading the supervision which workers had been able to exercise over them in private enterprises since the Five-Anti movement. This led some workers to think that

before joint management, capitalists had to accept the workers' supervision; after joint management, some capitalists were assigned by the state to take up the duties of factory director or manager and the workers instead had to heed the capitalists instructions.... since joint management [came in], the capitalists have been riding roughshod over the workers even more, and the workers' power is actually less than it was before joint management.³⁸

The official explanation offered to workers was that such personnel were 'serving socialism under the leadership of the working class and of the state' and '[could] not in the slightest belittle the leading position of the working class in jointly-managed enterprises'³⁹, and that workers had no need of their old powers of supervision as they had now 'moved from supervising production to managing it directly together with the state representatives.'⁴⁰ This might have persuaded workers but for the fact that, as we shall see in more detail later, institutions for direct participation such

37 Nanfang Ribao 9.1.56, 1.

38 "Socialist education study materials for the working class" supplementary material - is joint state-private management better, or is private management better?', Zhongguo Gongren 6, March 1958, 21.

39 Ibid., 22.

40 Ibid., 21.

as the workers' congress were subject to important restrictions on their powers which always threatened to undermine them, and were in any case fairly easy for cadres to ignore or evade if they so wished. In practice, state representatives could run joint enterprises as they saw fit, without consulting workers or allowing them to participate in management. So workers were left with the thought that

Since joint management, the capitalists have a professional position, and also have fixed interest [payments] and high salaries; they live an easy life in the same old way while workers still have their noses to the grindstone. ⁴¹

In this situation it was not surprising that 'some workers even [thought] that the Party's policy [was] rightist' ⁴².

This combination of continued (relative) economic hardship, social inequality and political restriction led during 1956 to the appearance among disillusioned workers of the attitude noted above, namely that their labour was 'a commodity for which one negotiated the best price' ⁴³ and that their only defence against exploitation, in socialist as in capitalist enterprises, was the selective disposal or ultimately the withdrawal of that labour. Thus the scene was set for growing labour unrest and conflict between workers and Party and government authorities during 1956, with the same bureaucratist attitudes among cadres which successive campaigns after liberation had failed to remove now pushing workers towards methods of direct action which, if not actually illegal, certainly lacked official approval.

The high-level support for increased democratization, participation in management, and concern for workers' material

41 Ibid., 22.

42 Ibid., 22.

43 Ibid., 172.

well-being which gained ground after the 8th Party Congress in September 1956 might have been expected to ameliorate this situation, but it seems to have had little immediate impact at the enterprise level, with some workers having so little faith in the system of workers' congresses, for example, that they refused to elect representatives.⁴⁴ It is equally possible that the policy's very prominence, rhetorically if not in fact, actually exacerbated workers' anger and bitterness against the official trade union, the enterprise administration, and ultimately the Party and government, thus precipitating even more acute conflict in the spring of 1957. This can be taken as a Chinese example of the situation which we noted earlier with reference to Eastern Europe, where 'the official ideology makes claims on behalf of the industrial workers which the day to day reality contradicts'⁴⁵, resulting in sharp and persistent conflict between workers and the regime.

Background to the 1956-7 industrial conflict

Democratic management

From about the middle of 1956, something of a backlash against authoritarian or undemocratic management in general, and against the system of one-man management in particular, begins to emerge in the trade union press. It has already been noted that this system of management was never introduced in all areas or all industrial sectors in China, and indeed there were early signs of less than wholehearted support for it at the highest level.⁴⁶ But even where this specific

44 Nanfang Ribao 3.6.57, 1.

45 Denitch, 'Yugoslav Exceptionalism', in Triska and Gati (eds.) *Blue-collar workers in Eastern Europe*, 254.

46 See Stephen Andors' comments in *China's industrial revolution - politics, planning and management, 1949 to the present*, 59.

system was not in operation, the tendency mentioned in the last section to emphasize strict labour discipline and to regard production as the sole criterion on which to judge an enterprise's performance was by 1956 very pronounced, and seems to have resulted in a rather authoritarian style of management in most if not all industrial enterprises.

In one analysis in 1957 of what had gone wrong in the system of democratic management set up in enterprises after liberation, the problem was traced back beyond the spread of Soviet management practices to central and south China, to defects in the organization of FMCs, specifically the excessive powers of the factory director as *ex officio* chair of the committee with the right of veto over its decisions. The author observed that

From certain articles of the regulations, it would appear that the FMC possessed very great power, but in reality, when it came to implementation, power was completely concentrated in the hands of the factory director. Moreover, at its meetings it mostly discussed the problems raised by the higher level and the administration and very few questions raised by the masses. Because of this, the masses' interest in the FMC declined, while the leading administrative cadres found its existence no longer justified, and it could not but decline into formalism.⁴⁷

This description of the weaknesses of democratic management in Chinese enterprises accords with our findings in the previous section. The WRC seems to have suffered the same fate as the FMC, with workers in Guangzhou in 1957 reporting that their

47 Su Ke, 'The problem of democratic management of state-private enterprises viewed in the light of workers' experience in industrial management', *Gongren Ribao*, 5.1.57, in SCMP 1491, 13.3.57, 8.

housing problems had been repeatedly raised in this forum, without any response from enterprise leaders.⁴⁸

This lack of democracy and absence of genuine participation in state enterprises spread to private enterprises on the latter's transformation to joint state-private status. How much scope there had been for democratic participation in private enterprises between the end of the Five-Anti movement in mid-1952 and nationalization in early 1956 is difficult to gauge given the lack of attention to it in the press. Much is made in articles advocating the expansion of democracy in 1956-7 of the powerful role of the trade unions in the old private enterprises, and of the supervisory powers over private management enjoyed by the production-increase-and-economy committees (formed during the campaign of the same name) made up of workers and staff.⁴⁹ Chen Yun, discussing the transformation of industry at the Eighth Party Congress in 1956, said that unions had had 'a high degree of authority over the enterprise management'⁵⁰ after the Five-Anti campaign.

But according to one 1956 account from Wuhan, the union participation in the democratic management of private enterprises mandated by workers after the Five-Anti movement virtually ceased during 1953 under the influence of one-man management, causing great dissatisfaction among workers who did not feel that they were the masters of the enterprise in any real sense.⁵¹ So it seems that democratic management in private enterprises may have reached a peak in the year or so

48 *Guangzhou Ribao* 19.5.57, 2.

49 See for example *ibid.*, 8; *Renmin Ribao*, 30.11.56, 'Bring the fighting role of trade unions into play in state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1433, 18.12.56, 3.

50 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing) 21.9.56, in *Nanfang Ribao* 22.9.56, 3.

51 *Gongren Ribao* 4.12.56, 2.

immediately after the Five-Anti movement before going into decline. Whatever the actual extent of management democratization in private enterprises during these years, it is clear that there was a feeling among workers themselves that powers and influence in the enterprise which they once enjoyed had been lost when their enterprises were nationalized: at the Eighth Party Congress, workers were said to be asking 'why it is that workers' and staff members' powers have actually declined since joint management? Why do former capitalists still have power and position in the enterprise today?' ⁵²

It is equally clear that workers and trade unions were in a much less ambiguous position in the event of a confrontation with private management than they were in any disputes after 1956 when ultimate power in the enterprise had passed into the hands of state representatives:

The administrative cadres headed by representatives of the state ... placed under their control the entire administrative work of the enterprises. Trade union cadres and the masses, finding it impossible to enquire into the management of enterprises, had quite some cause for complaint. ⁵³

It does indeed seem to have been difficult in this period for workers to make any criticism of administrative cadres. Such was the attitude of factory directors and other high-ranking cadres to their own authority that they tended to react to any criticism, justified or not, as if it were an act of rebellion and a serious attack, not on their personal actions or style of work, but on the state organization which they represented. Thus workers raising perfectly reasonable criticisms found themselves accused of, and even punished for, 'undisciplined

52 See Chen Yun's speech at the Eighth Congress, cited above.

53 Su Ke, 8-9.

and unorganized behaviour' ⁵⁴, or 'opposing the management' ⁵⁵. It was reported that 'some enterprises even draw up a lot of 'prohibitions' to restrict workers and staff' ⁵⁶, for example banning criticism of the higher level by the lower, i.e. workers, in production conferences and other meetings.

The phenomenon of retaliation by factory directors against their low-ranking critics was by all accounts widespread, with the imposition of arbitrary and 'unlawful punishments' ⁵⁷ common in many enterprises and 'very serious' ⁵⁸ in some. In extreme cases, reassignment to unsuitable work-posts, perhaps forcing a worker to travel much longer distances to work, could be arranged by a director ⁵⁹, but the favoured method of warning off critics appears to have been 'one-to-one chats' with the director, or '"one-to-one threats"' ⁶⁰ as they were perhaps more accurately termed. Such an attitude on the part of the factory director could easily spread commandist and coercive methods to all levels of the enterprise, as reflected in the workers' saying that '"each level orders the next about, and the workers order the machines about."' ⁶¹ With this style of management rapidly becoming the norm, it was not long before the question was

54 'Covert suppression of criticism', *Zhongguo Gongren* 16, August 1956, 4.

55 'Can you treat someone who raises a criticism like this?', *Zhongguo Gongren* 20, October 1956, 11.

56 'Discussing "one-man management" in enterprises', *Zhongguo Gongren* 16, August 1956, 5.

57 Ibid., 5. See also *Gongren Ribao* 18.5.56, 1, and 14.7.56, 2.

58 Ibid., 5.

59 'Can you treat someone who raises a criticism like this?', *Zhongguo Gongren* 20, 11.

60 'Covert suppression of criticism', *Zhongguo Gongren* 16, 4.

61 'Discussing "one-man management" in enterprises', *Zhongguo Gongren* 16, 5.

posed:

This quite simply is feudal order; the "managers" in these enterprises have become the feudal kings of petty kingdoms. How can this phenomenon be allowed to continue to exist in socialist enterprises? ⁶²

The trade union crisis

The enterprise trade unions must bear some of the blame for the state of affairs described above, since they patently were failing in their duty to protect workers' interests. The accusation by one worker that the trade unions had 'lost ... their guts since the Seventh National Congress' ⁶³ in 1953 has some basis in fact, since the charges of economism which were made at that time, and the accompanying purge of many of the top leadership of the ACFTU, had left the unions cowed and somewhat reluctant to be outspoken in defence of workers' rights when such statements could easily be construed by Party authorities as further outbreaks of economism and syndicalism. It was in fact acknowledged by Lai Ruoyu and others in the ACFTU leadership that although it had been necessary to attack these tendencies, the unions had subsequently gone too far in the opposite direction, committing the error of bureaucratism and showing no concern for their members' interests and failing to support their proper demands. ⁶⁴

Careerism among union cadres must also be mentioned in this context: the fact that being a union official was often

62 Ibid., 5.

63 *Gongren Ribao*, 21.5.57, 'What is the real fundamental cause behind the trade union work "crisis"?', in *SCMP* 1551, 17.6.57, 19.

64 See *Gongren Ribao* 22.5.56, 7; 12.5.56, 1; 24.9.56, 2.

the first rung on the ladder of promotion which might eventually lead to Party membership, with all its attendant privileges, created its own pressures on cadres not to rock the boat by siding with workers against factory leadership. The same applied to union cadres who were already Party members. Each one faced the choice of

blindly carrying out under Party discipline a policy which he knows to be wrong, and thereby separating himself from the workers through the deviation of "commandism", or else ignoring the directive and thereby becoming a "tail of the masses" and jeopardizing his Party career.⁶⁵

In practice, as had happened in the spring of 1950, unions tended to side with the administration in any case where workers' views conflicted with those of the factory leadership. Union cadres were roundly criticized for making 'unprincipled concessions'⁶⁶ and giving in to administrative cadres without an argument whenever they expressed divergent views. Many union officials seem to have been ruled by their fear of 'spoiling relations'⁶⁷ with the administration and thereby losing its support for their work in future; they were afraid that a stand against the administration on whatever issue would be remembered when the time came to evaluate them for wage increases and promotion.⁶⁸ The safest course for the trade unions was to concentrate on those welfare matters which came under their jurisdiction, and on the organization of labour emulation competitions and other activities which promoted production and so were unlikely to lead to any conflict with the administration.

65 Harper, 'Party and unions', 88.

66 Gongren Ribao 4.5.57, 3.

67 Gongren Ribao 2.3.56, 2.

68 Gongren Ribao 4.5.57, 3.

Trade union defence of workers' rights in private enterprises seems to have been greatly weakened after their transfer to joint state-private ownership, as the authoritarian tendencies of many state representatives affected their performance of their duties and undermined their supervisory role. It was reported in December 1956 that

Some state representatives think: when the enterprises were privately run, trade unions had to exercise supervision to prevent capitalists' illegal activities. Now that enterprises have implemented joint management, with state representatives heading the administration, they are managing it on behalf of the state, and if the trade union wants to exercise supervision, won't it just be stirring up opposition to the administration and seeking trouble for its own people? ⁶⁹

Some state representatives, it was said, 'even demand that the trade union obey the administrative leadership' ⁷⁰. And some trade union cadres were themselves unsure of their rights in the new situation, thinking 'the state representatives are cadres appointed by the state, of a higher level than us, so how can we possibly supervise them?' ⁷¹

Enterprise trade union cadres were reminded in this article, which appeared in the ACFTU's official journal and therefore can be assumed to have the backing of the union leadership, that they had the full authority of the Constitution (Article 17) and of the Trade Union Law (Article

69 'Should the trade union organization supervise the administration in joint state-private enterprises?', *Zhongguo Gongren* 23, December 1956, 3.

70 Ibid., 3.

71 Ibid., 3.

7) to ensure mass criticism and supervision of the enterprise leadership and to protect workers' interests and supervise the administration's adherence to Party policy and the law.⁷² Although the common task of the administration and the trade union was 'to promote the development of production and on that basis to improve the material and cultural lives of the working masses'⁷³, and although the trade union was supposed in normal circumstances to exercise its authority in support of the administration, there was a possibility that administrative power might be used inappropriately, in which case

this [would] often tend to distort Party and state policy and laws and harm the democratic rights and material interests of the working masses. So the trade union, as a mass organization and a body representing the interests of workers, must exercise supervision in respect of the administration, to prevent the misuse of administrative power.⁷⁴

Unions were urged to 'struggle against any abuse of administrative power, failure to act on the masses' proposals, attacks or reprisals against people making complaints, arbitrary punishment of workers etc..⁷⁵; as we have already seen, it was precisely this which enterprise trade unions had been failing to do during 1956. The Soviet sinologist A P Davydov noted that in the drive for production at this time,

not only were the opinions of workers ignored, many unions at the enterprise level dealt harshly with

72 Ibid., 3.

73 Ibid., 3.

74 Ibid., 3.

those who complained. The unions' neglect of worker interests is evident in the greatly increased number of occupational injuries.⁷⁶

In Guangzhou the root cause of the 1956 increase in industrial accidents involving injury or death was identified as leadership bureaucratism, i.e. a lack of concern for workers' health and safety and the view that safety precautions would hinder the completion of production quotas, and should therefore be dispensed with. Unions were frequently criticized not only for their failure to protect workers' interests, but even more for their role in actually enforcing dangerous practices such as excessive overtime.⁷⁷

Why was it that the unions were so ineffective in defence of workers' rights? In 1957 workers in Guangzhou were said to have 'dubbed their trade unions "workers' control department" ... "tongue of bureaucracy" and "tail of administration"' ⁷⁸. Their bitterness towards the unions is understandable, but it should be remembered that, as we saw in the first section, there were genuine difficulties inherent in the role of the official trade unions. They were obliged both to support the administration and to protect workers' rights and interests. In theory there was no conflict between these two tasks, but in practice many union cadres did see their dual responsibilities as incompatible ⁷⁹, and when a conflict arose, as it all too often did, it was extremely difficult for unions to side with the workers without provoking charges of economism, syndicalism, or challenging Party and state authority.

76 A P Davydov, quoted in Gilbert Rozman, *A mirror for socialism - Soviet criticisms of China*, 112.

77 *Nanfang Ribao* 14.6.56, 2, and 15.6.56, 1.

78 *Renmin Ribao*, 9.5.57, 'On an 8,000 li tour of hurried observation', in *SCMP* 1551, 17.6.57, 10.

79 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 4.5.57, 3, and 7.5.57, 1.

It might have been possible for trade unions to fulfil their obligations towards their members if they had had the necessary support from the administration, but often the actions of the administration would undermine the union's authority and prestige among workers. In some enterprises there were 'even instances where production plans and safety and welfare measures were kept "secret" from the trade unions' ⁸⁰ by administrative cadres. When workers made requests for welfare benefits to which they were entitled (such as emergency loans or allowances for visiting sick relatives etc.), the request would be dealt with by the chairperson of their trade union small group or section committee, in other words by a fairly low-level union cadre with little real authority in the enterprise and no control over budgets. Cases were reported in the second half of 1956 where such requests had been arbitrarily turned down several times by the enterprise administration, whereupon the worker or workers concerned would go over the head of the ineffectual cadre to an administrative cadre or to the enterprise trade union chairperson, who was usually a Party member and therefore did have real power in the enterprise. The request would then be granted without further ado, leaving workers to conclude that the trade union at the lower level simply would not take the trouble to do even a simple thing for them, and that in future it would be better to rely on their own resources to get things done. ⁸¹

The outlines of the trade union crisis which came to a head in the spring of 1957 can be seen from the above comments. The basic problem was the same as in 1950, that of obligation without authority: the trade union did not have the

80 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing), 23.11.56, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1422, 3.12.56, 3.

81 See for example two articles in the series 'How can trade union activists do a good job in the trade union work they've taken upon themselves?', in *Zhongguo Gongren* nos.15, August 1957, 4, and 19, October 1956, 12.

right to give orders to anyone in the enterprise, but had to rely on persuasion and education to see that the work it delegated to activists or ordinary trade union members was accomplished. Since it relied on this sort of mobilization, the vicious circle of ineffectiveness in helping its members and lowered prestige among workers was a particularly destructive one for trade unions. Union cadres were forced to conclude that their organization

really has no position and no power, when there's a problem, what the trade union says doesn't count, it can't take responsibility, and the factory director must ratify [anything] before it can take effect.⁸²

A series of articles in the labour movement monthly *Zhongguo Gongren*⁸³ between August and November 1956, consisting almost entirely of contributions from workers, described in considerable detail the nature of the crisis in trade union work as experienced by trade union activists and lower-level cadres, and in particular highlighted the effect of the reformed wage structure and the system of material incentives then in force in industry on these people's willingness and ability to do trade union work. As we noted in the previous section, the problem of responsibility without authority was most acute for union activists who had no official position and whose union work was purely voluntary. Their complaints and the universal demoralization which is evident in these accounts show that activists' position had not improved substantially since their original protests about

82 Ibid., 12.

83 The six articles appeared in issues no. 15 (August 1956), 18 (September), 19, 20 (October), 21 and 22 (November). Appearing under the heading 'How can trade union activists do a good job in the trade union work they've taken upon themselves?', they will hereafter be referred to as 'Trade union activists' 1-6.

the lack of support for their activities in 1950.

It emerges from these accounts that most activists and lower-level cadres felt that union work was a thankless task which frequently got them into trouble both with the administration and with their fellow workers. Many frankly admitted that they were waiting impatiently for the next round of union elections when they would have a chance to pass their responsibilities on to someone else.⁸⁴ One of the contributors to this series described the typical activist's career thus:

When trade union activists first take on responsibility for trade union work they have great energy, but afterwards their energy diminishes more and more with time, until finally they don't want to go on; this is virtually an activist's law of development.⁸⁵

The reasons behind activists' plummeting morale are not hard to find. Firstly, all their trade union work was supposed to be done in their spare time. One problem with this, which also applied to lower-level union cadres, was that after work workers who did not live in enterprise dormitories would disperse and go home, making it impossible to do any union work with them. Another was that however well-organized and experienced in their jobs activists were (some work, for example that connected with union-administered labour insurance or with finances, was quite technical, and activist competence could be a problem), they simply did not have enough spare time for all the work they were supposed to do, mainly because many of them held more than one post concurrently. Judging from the evidence in these articles, it

84 See for example 'Trade union activists' 1, *Zhongguo Gongren* 15, 6.

85 'Trade union activists' 2, *Zhongguo Gongren* 18, 11.

was not unusual for a union small group head, for example, to hold five or six posts simultaneously, and s/he might in the past have held as many as nine.⁸⁶

When trade union work did encroach on working hours, it not merely 'incurred the displeasure of the administration'⁸⁷, but could also have a direct effect on the income of the activist or cadre concerned and that of his/her colleagues. Under the newly established eight-grade wage system, workers were appraised for promotion with reference to factors such as their performance in production, technical skill and attitude to labour. Any enforced absence from the shop floor on union business would adversely affect an activist's rating on all these criteria. In enterprises which practised a system of group piece-work, an activist's poor performance might mean the group as a whole failed to reach its target and thus lost income, not something calculated to boost the prestige of the trade union. And if activists and cadres did spend all their spare time doing union work they still lost out, falling behind their colleagues in technical skill as they had no time for study. One small-group head recounted how in the course of his union career,

my apprentices all overtook me, and some had already been promoted from grade two to grade six; quite a few workers who were originally grade six workers like me have gone ahead of me, and all get paid more than me.⁸⁸

The common feeling among activists and lower-level cadres was that far from their union work doing any good, it was

86 See 'Trade union activists' 1, *Zhongguo Gongren* 15, 5, and 2, *Zhongguo Gongren* 18, 11.

87 'Trade union activists' 1, *Zhongguo Gongren* 15, 5.

88 Ibid., 6.

actually harmful, not only to themselves in terms of their performance in production, technical progress and pay, but also to their colleagues, since they could do nothing to assist them without the cooperation of the enterprise administration and might drag down their income and lose them bonuses through time spent away from production on union work. A common theme, as mentioned above, was the lack of support from the enterprise administration, and also, in the case of activists, from the enterprise trade union leadership, who were accused by one worker (in terms almost identical to those we saw in 1950) of

treating us like "a brick picked up to knock on the door"; when they can use us, they press us into service, and when they can't they cast us aside, and nobody gives a damn.⁸⁹

According to this worker, the leadership's attitude 'not only turns dedicated and energetic trade union activists into demoralized ones, but also produces a bad impression of activists among the masses, so no-one is prepared to do trade union work.'⁹⁰ He insisted that he was fully aware of the importance of trade union work and would be willing to undertake it at any time, but only on condition of 'understanding, concern and support'⁹¹ for activists from the union and administrative leadership. Otherwise, he felt that he could make more of a contribution to socialism by doing a good job in production and improving his skills, and some of his more sympathetic colleagues had urged him to do exactly that.

It was of course quite convenient for the higher levels to have the basic-level trade union in the enterprise bearing

89 'Trade union activists' 3, *Zhongguo Gongren* 19, 13.

90 *Ibid.*, 13.

91 *Ibid.*, 13.

the brunt of workers' discontent at their lack of material progress and democratic influence after the socialist transformation of industry. When, for example, a union's inability to stand up to the administration and protect workers from excessive overtime resulted in damage to workers' health and posed the risk of a serious accident⁹², workers' anger would not unnaturally be directed primarily at the trade union. But in spite of some harsh criticism from workers of union cadres' bureaucratism and general ineffectiveness during 1956 and the spring of 1957, workers seem to have been well aware of the difficulty of their position as 'fourth class' cadres (ranking below Party and Youth League cadres and technical personnel in terms of influence and authority in the enterprise). They did not agree with the view that cadres' work-style was the main problem, and pointed instead to their lack of authority in the enterprise and the almost total lack of cooperation they received from management and enterprise Party committees.

Workers felt that trade unions were 'not in a position to support the proper demands of the masses'⁹³, and could do nothing about the arbitrary rejection of such demands. They were aware that union cadres who did try to defend workers' rights and so came into conflict with the administrative or Party leadership in the enterprise tended to be accused of trying to perpetuate class struggle even though enterprises were no longer privately owned, as in the comment that '[y]our trade union is not the labour side and the administration is not the capital side. No reason for staging the same play!'⁹⁴ They also pointed out their own difficulties in selecting union cadres who would actually defend their

92 Such an incident is described in 'Trade union activists' 1, *Zhongguo Gongren* 15, August 1956, 5.

93 *Gongren Ribao*, 21.5.57, 'What is the fundamental cause behind the trade union work "crisis"?', in *SCMP* 1551, 17.6.57, 15.

94 *Ibid.*, 19.

interests: cadres who 'always backed up the masses' ⁹⁵ had problems with their careers and with getting or keeping Party membership, and those who 'persisted in the proper demands of the masses, were accused of "conceit", "no respect for Party leadership" or "fomenting discord and independence"'. ⁹⁶

In fact, the problem with the unions as far as workers were concerned, as in 1950, was a dual one: not only that CCP policies put pressure on them not to respond to workers' demands and to side with the administration, but also that they still were not democratic organizations elected and controlled by their members. New ACFTU regulations on the election of basic-level union committees were published in February 1956 ⁹⁷, and an article the following month revealed the sort of practices which these regulations were intended to curb. It was reported that many unions were failing to hold regular elections and meetings of members, that where meetings were held, most of the time was taken up with the chair's report leaving little time for discussion, and that workers were being prevented from discussing or approving candidates for election to the committee, being compelled instead to elect whatever list of candidates was presented to them by acclamation rather than balloting. ⁹⁸ This resulted in weak basic-level union organizations which were separated from workers, led by cadres who were the 'bosses', rather than members, of the masses. ⁹⁹ As had happened in 1950, the weakness of 'the administration's union department' ¹⁰⁰ and

95 Ibid., 20.

96 Ibid., 21.

97 Gongren Ribao 24.2.52, 2.

98 Gongren Ribao 17.3.56, 1. For confirmation of undemocratic election practices among Guangzhou trade unions, see Guangzhou Ribao 17.5.57, 2.

99 Gongren Ribao 11.5.57, 1.

100 Gongren Ribao 18.5.57, 3.

its lack of contact with its members militated against its being able to defend their interests effectively even where cadres were inclined to support workers against the administration, while undemocratic election practices reduced workers' chances of getting into office cadres who would support them.

Given workers' low regard for their unions and their awareness of the constraints on union cadres' activities, it is not surprising that they were quick to abandon the official trade union organization whenever they felt the need to confront the enterprise leadership on any issue. The enterprise trade union thus became an irrelevance in disputes, and workers who had become accustomed to taking individual problems and demands straight to the administrative leadership or to the Party began to do the same thing collectively, organizing themselves to present their demands to those they believed had the power to meet them. Together with the absence of any effective means of influencing the administration through democratic representation or participation in management, this meant that there remained no intermediary structures between the discontented workers on the one hand and the Party and administrative authorities on the other. Since by spring 1957 collective management under the leadership of the enterprise Party committee had been established, this in turn meant that '[t]he decisive confrontation took place between the Party and the working class.... All disputes developed into a political confrontation.'

¹⁰¹

101 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 276.

Workers' discontent: welfare, wages and privilege

It was in 1956, when, as we have seen, workers were perhaps least well provided with effective mechanisms or organizations through which they could defend their interests, that economic and social pressures on them resulting from the First Five-Year Plan's emphasis on accumulation and heavy industrial development became acute. As was noted above, workers who were already accustomed to bypassing their trade union representatives when seeking solutions to their individual problems in the workplace not unnaturally now took the same course collectively, when in the aftermath of nationalization and wage reform groups of workers, or sometimes the whole workforce of an enterprise, found themselves at a disadvantage. Hence the large number of strikes, petitions, demonstrations, go-slows and incidences of mass absenteeism which marked industrial life during 1956, and continued into 1957.

An internal ACFTU report for the year 1956 noted twenty-nine strikes and fifty-six petitions during the year, not including incidents registered by the trade union statistical service. Oral accounts mentioned in this report give much higher figures for individual cities: for example, there were said to have been more than forty incidences of strikes and petitions in Xi'an alone, while Shanghai saw a total of eighty-six incidents, increasing throughout the year from six in the first quarter to forty-one in the final quarter.¹⁰² This apparent escalation tallies with accounts of wage reform disputes which resulted in industrial action, which seem to have peaked in November 1956.¹⁰³ Unfortunately comparative

102 *Zhongguo Gongyun* 2, 1957, quoted in Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 189.

103 See for example *Guangzhou Ribao* 10.5.57, 2; *Nanfang Ribao* 25.4.57, 1; *Gongren Ribao* 25.4.57, 1; 30.4.57, 2. These articles refer to such disputes in Guangzhou, Tianjin and Wuhan.

figures for other years are hard to come by, although as we saw in the previous section there were reports of strikes during the early post-liberation period. However, it seems clear from these figures that the level of industrial unrest in China in 1956 was very high.

The reasons behind this unrest are not difficult to find: 'Wages, authoritarian assignments, working and living conditions were at the centre of all demands'¹⁰⁴, with inequality between workers' and cadres' households a particular cause of friction. To start with working and living conditions: we have already noted the pressures on workers during 1956 as the deadline for meeting the production targets of the First Five-Year Plan approached, and the results in terms of increased industrial accidents and injuries which followed. After the nationalization of Guangzhou's remaining state enterprises in January 1956, calls for a 'high tide' of production were made, with workers encouraged to focus their efforts on improving production during a six-month period of 'business as usual' in enterprises.¹⁰⁵ It was denied that the retention of old management systems during this period would dampen workers' enthusiasm for socialist transformation¹⁰⁶, and cadres were instead warned of the dangers of lagging behind workers who, it was claimed, were themselves supporting this policy and pressing for increased norms and production targets¹⁰⁷. Our natural scepticism about such claims should perhaps be tempered by the undoubted enthusiasm for the new era of joint management initially expressed by many workers, including the participant in the 'Wang Cai' debate quoted earlier, but it is

104 Ibid., 189.

105 *Nanfang Ribao* 3.2.56, 1; 12.2.56, 1.

106 *Renmin Ribao*, 'We must not lightly change original production and management systems', in *Nanfang Ribao* 12.2.56, 1.

107 *Nanfang Ribao* 23.3.56, 1.

likely that the pressure for results in production even at the expense of basic safety during this period quickly dissipated this enthusiasm.

Following an ACFTU conference on labour protection, welfare and housing in May 1956, a renewed emphasis on workers' safety, livelihood and welfare is evident not only in articles in the labour movement press¹⁰⁸, but also in the local press in Guangzhou. From June 12-18, the *Nanfang Ribao* published a series of articles¹⁰⁹ exposing the bureaucratist indifference among enterprise administrative and union cadres and the staff of various industrial bureaux to workers' substandard working and living conditions. No-one could accuse the paper's reporters of a lack of courage in exposing bureaucratism this time, as in the time-honoured style of investigative reporting they first detailed blatant violations of workers' basic rights and interests, and then presented their evidence to the relevant authorities, recording in detail for their readers the unconcerned, evasive, or downright hostile responses this provoked. These articles, accompanied by editorials reinforcing their message on welfare, safety, excessive overtime etc., were followed by admissions from one of the top leaders of the ACFTU, Liu Ningyi¹¹⁰, and the CCP's Minister of Labour, Ma Wenrui¹¹¹, that progress in these areas had lagged far behind improvements in labour productivity, not just in the six months since nationalization, but going right back to the

108 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 31.5.56, 2; 6.6.56, 1; 12.6.56, 1; 24.6.56, 2; 5.7.56, 2; 7.7.56, 2.

109 The articles appeared on page 2 of the paper on June 12-15 and 18. Accounts of similarly poor living and working conditions in other Chinese cities can be found, in translation, in *Union Research Service* 3, 5, 17.4.56, 'Many workers complain of poor living standards'.

110 *Nanfang Ribao* 25.6.56, 6. A deputy chairman of the ACFTU at this point, Liu succeeded Lai Ruoyu as chairman in 1958.

111 *Nanfang Ribao* 2.7.56, 2.

beginning of the First Five-Year Plan in 1953.

At one of the enterprises visited by a *Nanfang Ribao* reporter, a construction site on the outskirts of Guangzhou, the deputy chairperson of the union recounted how petty economy measures had aroused discontent among the workers. For example, the cost of the tea-leaves provided to workers had been transferred from the welfare to the construction budget and then the provision had been withdrawn, to 'save' on construction expenses. Transport was a major problem on this site, as was the overcrowded canteen with its poor quality food; workers were not allowed to use waste materials to build furniture in their spare time for their bamboo shacks on the site, and so had no chairs or tables for study outside working hours. All these matters had been repeatedly raised by the union, but, as this union cadre put it, 'the higher-ups always pretend not to know anything about it' ¹¹².

These sorts of 'little problems', it was reported, also existed on other sites, but were not going unsolved because of a lack of funds. On the contrary, tens of thousands of yuan in medical subsidies and enterprise reward funds were piling up unused, and the labour insurance fund of the No.3 Construction Company was running a monthly surplus of 2,000 yuan, with 22,000 yuan left unspent from 1955. Various 'responsible personnel' at the company and at the Municipal Construction Engineering Bureau denied any responsibility for deciding how the money should be spent and were apparently unconcerned at the amounts accumulated; one official in the company's finance department, 'in response to repeated questioning', finally retorted, 'surely you don't think we should spend the whole day encouraging the use of this money?' ¹¹³ The finance departments did not publish details of the money they had accumulated, 'so the workers and union

112 *Nanfang Ribao* 12.6.56, 2.

113 *Ibid.*, 2.

organizations on the building sites don't know how much money the company or Bureau has which could be used to improve workers' livelihood and welfare.' ¹¹⁴ Senior union cadres in any case claimed to have been too busy with other campaigns to concentrate on these problems, leaving the reporter to conclude that with these "bureaucrats" and 'leading cadres who don't know anything about anything' ¹¹⁵ in charge, the prevalence of bureaucratism and indifference to workers' welfare was hardly surprising.

Similar attitudes were evident at two of the livestock rearing and meat supply stations which were part of the Guangzhou branch of the China Foodstuffs Co.. At one plant, workers shared a cramped, stuffy, insanitary warehouse with some of the company's livestock; the workers' accommodation could not be lit at night because of the fire risk in what was basically a barn. 'But for the mosquito nets and beds', the reporter noted, 'it would have been difficult to distinguish where the people lived and where the livestock.' ¹¹⁶ Serious problems with the provision of medical care and safety equipment also existed in these enterprises, but what caused the most resentment was the indifference of the higher levels to repeated requests for improvement. It was reported that

Company managers and department heads often came to check on the work, but every time they came, they were only concerned about whether any of the pigs or cattle had died, or asking whether they were ill? How were the animals fattening up? As for the workers' livelihood, they almost never asked about it. ¹¹⁷

114 Ibid., 2.

115 Ibid., 2.

116 Nanfang Ribao 13.6.56, 2.

117 Ibid., 2.

Workers at one of the plants had been allowed to use waste materials to build themselves recreation rooms and a canteen, but the five structures they built were in fact all used by the management as barns for livestock. 'Because the workers had volunteered their labour, the construction of these five new barns saved the state more than 1,600 yuan'¹¹⁸, but workers were no better off than before in terms of welfare amenities.

Two of the remaining articles dealt with the problem of excessive overtime and extra shifts, which by all accounts was widespread in Guangzhou and elsewhere at this time.¹¹⁹ Not only were enterprise leaders using this as their main method of fulfilling and over-fulfilling production quotas, in some cases regularly exceeding the legal maximum of 32 hours overtime by any worker in one month¹²⁰, but they were also finding ways to avoid paying workers the proper rates for this overtime. In some cases the job was done for them, when higher-level organs approved the overtime or extra shifts requested but then refused to provide any extra money for wages, so that the enterprise had to cut bonuses and other payments to workers to make up the amount, leaving workers at best no better off than if they had not worked the extra hours, and at worst reducing their income.¹²¹

Another plant had come up with a 'clever scheme' whereby overtime was 'borrowed' from workers during the enterprise's busy period, and workers could then request time off when production tasks were less pressing in lieu of the free time

118 Ibid., 2.

119 *Nanfang Ribao* 14.6.56, 2; 15.6.56, 1 and 2; *Gongren Ribao* 5.7.56, 2.

120 *Nanfang Ribao* 14.6.56, 2.

121 Ibid., 2.

they had foregone.¹²² However, since workers needed the administration's permission to regain their 'borrowed' time off, there was often a considerable delay before they could actually take it, with 'arrears' in some cases of more than a year, after which many gave up hope of ever getting the time off to which they were entitled. The deputy manager claimed that overtime was not a problem at the plant and was all strictly voluntary, something which workers flatly told the reporter was 'not true'. When he took his findings to the manager himself, the reporter was told, 'Comrade, I have to point out to you, we have backward workers here!'¹²³ The union in this enterprise also criticized as 'backward' workers who protested at the new system, and helped to enforce it. As well as the obvious effect on workers' health and morale, excessive overtime was also said to have had 'undesirable political consequences'¹²⁴ in some enterprises. These were not specified, but we can assume that they included sharp antagonism between workers and the enterprise leadership, including the union leadership, and probably some sort of industrial action as well.

The many pressures on workers' incomes were revealed by various sections of the press during the summer of 1956. Reference was made to the profiteering of public utilities which were levying high charges¹²⁵, and fares on public transport and rents were also singled out as too high for many workers to afford.¹²⁶ The emphasis on economizing in enterprises led to a policy of 'commercializing' canteens and other facilities, i.e. raising the prices paid by workers so

122 Nanfang Ribao 15.6.56, 2.

123 Ibid., 2.

124 Nanfang Ribao 15.6.56, 1.

125 Liu Ningyi, 'Overcome the tendency not to care about the livelihood of workers and staff', Nanfang Ribao 25.6.56, 6.

126 See Gongren Ribao 31.5.56, 2; 7.7.56, 2; Nanfang Ribao 4.9.56, 1-2.

that these facilities made a profit. At the same time petty money-saving measures were introduced which had an adverse effect on working conditions out of all proportion to the financial saving made: in one factory in Guangzhou, for example, workers were forbidden to use the enterprise's tap water for washing when they came off shift from high-temperature glass workshops, thus saving about 10 yuan per month on the factory's water bill.¹²⁷ There was reportedly some misappropriation of welfare and medical funds in the new joint enterprises¹²⁸, and many enterprises let their medical and hygiene funds (constituting 5-7% of the wage bill) pile up unused while workers and their dependents fell behind with hospital bills. In some cases patients who had recovered were 'detained' in hospital until money could be borrowed by their relatives to pay off their bills.¹²⁹ Funds for workers' housing were also improperly diverted to other uses, and planned housing construction cancelled as an economy measure.¹³⁰

Once the seriousness of the neglect of workers' welfare and the ignorance on the part of administrative and union cadres about workers' genuine difficulties became clear, a campaign against bureaucratist indifference to workers' problems and the separation of cadres from the masses was launched. Delegations of cadres, especially from the unions, visited workers' homes to find out the real circumstances of their lives and to offer emergency relief to those in difficulties, and newspapers ran articles detailing the large

127 *Nanfang Ribao* 18.6.56, 2. For other examples of 'capitalist management' of welfare amenities, see *Union Research Service* 3, 5, especially pages 66-68.

128 *Nanfang Ribao* 18.8.56, 2.

129 *Nanfang Ribao* 19.8.56, 2.

130 *Nanfang Ribao* 25.6.56, 6; *Gongren Ribao* 6.6.56, 1; 24.6.56, 2.

amounts of money now being spent on welfare and housing.¹³¹ Indeed, a report from Shanghai on the 'unprincipled accommodation' by cadres of all workers' welfare demands, regardless of merit, accused cadres of picking out isolated points from higher-level directives to support their own 'deviations'¹³², with the result that enterprise welfare funds for the whole year had been exhausted during the first half or even the first quarter of the year. A *Renmin Ribao* editorial criticized sections of the press for making too much of some workers' problems and raising expectations with regard to welfare and living standards¹³³, and the working-class tradition of 'hard work and plain and frugal living' was promoted once again as an antidote to the one-sided emphasis on opposing bureaucratism and improving workers' lives.¹³⁴

However, despite this mini-backlash against excessive concern for workers' welfare and living conditions, it seems unlikely that the 'welfare wind' of the summer of 1956 had any great effect. In fact, problems with housing and union cadres' refusal to grant emergency assistance to workers from welfare funds were still exercising workers in the spring and summer of the following year: they are the subject of many of the contributions from workers to the debate on Wang Cai's ideas in the *Guangzhou Ribao*, with one worker reporting that the findings of union cadres' home visits had been ignored by the administration, and that the union had subsequently failed to press workers' requests.¹³⁵ Workers also asserted that they had been criticized for demanding improvements in working conditions during this period and that their complaints had

131 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 16.7.56, 2; 19.7.56, 2; 8.8.56, 4; 2.9.56, 2.

132 'Don't bend with the wind', *Nanfang Ribao* 12.10.56, 1.

133 Reprinted in *Nanfang Ribao* 28.11.56, 1.

134 *Gongren Ribao* 23.12.56, 1.

135 *Guangzhou Ribao* 29.5.57, 2.

been suppressed.¹³⁶ It is evident from workers' comments at this time that many of them still considered welfare after nationalization to have been 'one step forward and two steps back'¹³⁷, with the old, 'irrational' and 'egalitarian' benefits such as double pay at the end of the year and allowances for meals, haircuts, laundry etc. abolished, but nothing of any substance put in their place.

One problem which clearly had not been successfully tackled, the withholding of welfare funds from workers, reemerged as a source of conflict the following year. We saw earlier that the accumulation of unspent funds while welfare problems went unsolved continued largely because workers and even lower-level union cadres did not know that the money existed. However, when awareness that money was available but was not being used for workers' benefit did begin to percolate down to workers, this not surprisingly caused enormous resentment. It was reported in the *Guangxi Ribao* in October 1957 that four months earlier, a worker of the Guilin Construction Engineering Company had 'collected fragmentary financial statements of the company, and distorted them by saying that the cadres "split the welfare funds among themselves" and that "the workers were denied any of them."' ¹³⁸ Passing on this information to others, a group of workers was alleged to have violently disrupted a mass meeting called to discuss workers' grievances and assaulted a union cadre whom they believed to be primarily responsible for the corrupt dividing-up of welfare funds; they then called a strike which lasted for three days. We have no way of knowing whether these accusations against cadres were true, but it is clear from earlier reports concerning the construction and other industries in Guangzhou that large sums were being

136 *Guangzhou Ribao* 17.5.57, 2.

137 *Guangzhou Ribao* 17.4.57, 2.

138 *Guangxi Ribao* 16.10.57, in *Union Research Service* 9, 20 (6.12.57), 314.

accumulated in welfare funds for no apparent reason, and cases of corruption were by no means unknown. The Guilin incident shows how unresolved problems of this nature which first surfaced during the 'welfare wind' of 1956 could eventually result in serious disturbances, if nothing was done to allay suspicions that cadres were benefitting themselves at workers' expense.

It was sometimes suggested during the second half of 1956 that the programme of wage reform carried out in all enterprises between April and October of that year would solve many of the difficulties workers were experiencing.¹³⁹ But as we shall see, not only did wage reform not solve many of these problems, it actually created some of its own (as well as exacerbating some existing problems, such as the difficult position of union activists, mentioned above), and became a major source of discontent and protest among workers.

The programme was intended to remove all remaining irrationalities and inconsistencies in the wage system left over from the pre-revolutionary era. The resulting integrated system would reflect the Party's priorities for 'decisive'¹⁴⁰ heavy industrial sectors during the First Five-Year Plan. It was a general principle in the reform that if workers were evaluated according to the new system and found to be in a lower grade or on a lower wage than before, they would keep their original grade and wage, so that the reform seemed to be in effect a general wage increase, with no workers seeing their pay reduced as a result of the new system of assessment¹⁴¹, and most seeing an increase. It was

139 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 25.6.56, 6.

140 'Why wage standards for different regions and industries are not the same', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, June 1956, 6.

141 Statements to this effect appear in 'Wage reform questions and answers', *Zhongguo Gongren* 10, May 1956, 4; 'Wage reform questions and answers', *Zhongguo Gongren* 13, July 1956, 6.

admitted, however, that wage reform would not solve all workers' livelihood difficulties, and workers were encouraged to help themselves by improving their technical skills, with those in serious difficulties to rely on trade union emergency allowances or mutual assistance funds.¹⁴² Given what we know about workers' difficulties in getting assistance from these sources, this clearly shows the limitations of the reform and the potential for continued hardship among some workers and their families.

Workers inclined towards more egalitarian forms of distribution and anxious about the widening of the gap between the highest and lowest wages both within and between grades were assured that

In a socialist society, disparities in wage standards are entirely necessary, and this sort of disparity is rational, and is an important part of the guiding principle for the realization of socialism of "more pay for more work, to each according to his work", and material incentives.¹⁴³

A regular system of evaluation, testing and promotion was to be put in place in every enterprise, with criteria for evaluation including workers' technical skill, speed of work, cultural level, and attitude to labour. No consideration was supposed to be given to workers' age or length of service in itself, since it was assumed that this would be reflected in higher technical capabilities and professional experience, both factors which could be taken into consideration when

142 'Wage reform questions and answers', *Zhongguo Gongren* 10, May 1956, 4.

143 'Wage standards', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, 7.

assessing workers' grades.¹⁴⁴ In fact, many veteran workers who were poorly educated or even illiterate found their wages rapidly overtaken by those of the new intake of young workers in 1956-7, many of them middle school graduates, in spite of the latter's lack of work experience, and this caused considerable resentment and friction in some enterprises.¹⁴⁵

If the new wage structure sounded reasonable enough in theory, its actual application, in Guangzhou as elsewhere, seems to have entailed considerable arbitrariness and injustice. It had always been claimed that the reform would end the phenomenon of workers receiving different pay for the same work, but in fact this was still a frequent occurrence. It was one of the main grievances of Wang Cai, a turner in an unnamed Guangzhou factory, whose letter to the *Guangzhou Ribao* in April 1957 complaining of leadership bureaucratism and lack of concern for workers' welfare in his enterprise began a two-month debate in the paper's pages.¹⁴⁶ Wang had been evaluated as a grade four worker during wage reform, but considered this unfair as he was capable of grade five work, and many workers with records similar to his had in fact been promoted to grade five. His own assessment of his abilities was actually vindicated when, due to pressure of work in the factory, cadres asked him to do the work of a grade five worker. Incensed, he refused, adopting the principle of 'work according to payment' (an chou fu lao) which, as we noted above, gained widespread support among workers at this time.

Many of the workers who joined the debate supported Wang's decision not to do any work for which he was not paid: what else, they asked rhetorically, did 'payment according to

144 'Wage reform questions and answers', *Zhongguo Gongren* 13, 4.

145 'How to handle internal contradictions in the enterprise correctly?', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, June 1957, 3-4.

146 The letter was published on April 10 1957, together with a call for widespread discussion of its contents.

work' mean? ¹⁴⁷ Workers protested that the new wage regulations had been inconsistently applied with no regard to the real situation on the factory floor, resulting in numerous mistakes. In some enterprises the problem of undemocratic management affected the reforms, with very little democratic discussion or consultation taking place before wage-grades were decided on. Cadres instead resorting to simplistic, commandist methods to carry out 'closed-door' reform in these plants, and in these cases dissatisfaction among workers was both widespread and justified. ¹⁴⁸ There were also clear instances of partiality and corruption where reforms were implemented in this way: in one enterprise, the entire department in charge of wage reform was promoted in the process, in marked contrast to the proportion promoted in other departments, and there were cases of preferential treatment for Party and Youth League members who gained undeserved promotions which were not approved by workers. ¹⁴⁹ All of the above criticisms of the wage reform process were admitted to be correct and justified in June 1957, in the article which brought to a close the 'Wang Cai' debate. ¹⁵⁰

Another aspect of wage reform which provoked discontent and protests was the promotion of piece-work. 1956 saw the percentage of the Chinese workforce on piece-rates peak at forty-two per cent. ¹⁵¹ Workers on this form of pay found that the frequent upward revision of norms which became common practice following the completion of wage reform 'systematically eroded [their] income', with wage gains 'eaten

147 *Guangzhou Ribao* 12.4.57, 2; 25.4.57, 2.

148 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 4.10.56, 2; 25.4.57, 1; 5.5.57, 3; *Guangzhou Ribao* 30.5.57, 2; 14.5.57, 2.

149 See *Nanfang Ribao* 4.5.57, 3; *Guangzhou Ribao* 17.5.57, 2.

150 *Guangzhou Ribao* 8.6.57, 2.

151 Barry Richman, *Industrial Society in Communist China*, 314.

away by increases in pace [of work] and productivity.' ¹⁵² Workers had been assured during the progress of the reform that the new piece-work system would include a basic wage as well as a piece-rate element, which would protect them from the old problem of severe or even complete loss of income in the event of work stoppages which were beyond their control, but in reality this measure does not seem to have had the intended effect. During the 'Wang Cai' debate, an official of the Municipal Textile Bureau conceded that the allowance paid to piece-rate workers in the new joint enterprises in the event of unavoidable stoppages in work was 'not enough to live on' ¹⁵³.

As the above comment indicates, after wage reform piece-workers still seem to have found themselves at a disadvantage in the event of power-cuts ('a common occurrence' ¹⁵⁴), errors on the part of management, late delivery of raw materials, or any other factor which might force production to be halted temporarily, since workers on time-rates received full pay during stoppages while piece-workers were not entitled to a supplementary allowance which came anywhere near their normal pay to make up for the lost production time. ¹⁵⁵ Hold-ups in production caused by management mistakes were particularly galling for workers. In their letters to the press, their anger at the administrative incompetence which undermined their own achievements in production and squandered their efforts comes across very clearly ¹⁵⁶; they were not solely concerned with its effect on their wages, but felt generally let down and exploited.

152 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 169.

153 Guangzhou Ribao 11.5.57, 2.

154 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 172.

155 Guangzhou Ribao 8.5.57, 2.

156 Guangzhou Ribao 25.5.56, 2.

The reorganization and amalgamation of enterprises after nationalization also affected the income of piece-workers, with norms in some factories being aligned with those of all other enterprises in the same line of work, regardless of factors such as the varying degree of mechanization or differences in conditions of work. In Guangzhou, it was reported that 4,727 industrial units employing 60,000 workers had been taken into joint state-private ownership in 1956 and reorganized into 700 enterprises¹⁵⁷. Given the scale of this reorganization, it is not surprising that complaints about the inappropriate alignment of norms featured in workers' letters to the *Guangzhou Ribao*. Two workers from the Yongguang Rubber Factory reported that their pre-reform pay of 100 yuan per month had been cut by 40% since then because after the reorganization norms in their factory had been aligned with those of other, more highly mechanized enterprises in the same sector.¹⁵⁸ A similar action by the management of the Canton Rubber Shoe Factory¹⁵⁹ meant that workers 'saw their pay fall by 70%'¹⁶⁰. Not only were their protests about this ignored, but the management 'reproached the recalcitrant workers for their passivity and poor spirit'¹⁶¹, treating the matter as an ideological problem on the part of the workers.

In May 1957 some of the undesirable consequences of the wage reform in Guangzhou were acknowledged when the Guangdong Party Committee cited dissatisfaction with wages as the prime cause behind thirteen instances of 'strikes and trouble-making

157 *Wen Hui Bao* (Hong Kong), 4.2.57, in *SCMP* 1468, 12.2.57, 19.

158 *Guangzhou Ribao* 8.5.57, 2. This and the following case are discussed in Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 169-172.

159 *Guangzhou Ribao* 10.6.57, 2.

160 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 169.

161 *Ibid.*, 169.

activities' in the province since the beginning of the year¹⁶². The 'giving of a bigger increase to factory [directors] and leading personnel and a smaller increase to workers'¹⁶³ was specifically mentioned. This was not the only instance of cadre privilege in enterprises at this time, as we shall see below. There is some evidence that workers in the new state-private enterprises were at a disadvantage when it came to wage rises: they were excluded from figures prepared by the city Statistical Bureau which showed that average workers' wages in Guangzhou had risen by 13% after wage reform.¹⁶⁴ Further evidence for this comes from a report in November 1956 that wages reduced after the nationalization of enterprises were now to be restored to their pre-nationalization level.¹⁶⁵

Housing, which came very low on the list of investment priorities at this point, was a serious problem in Guangzhou, where 'the overwhelming majority of the housing stock was dilapidated and insalubrious'¹⁶⁶, with 80% of it dating from the Qing dynasty or from before the Sino-Japanese War, and some flats too dangerous for habitation. This might have been a less divisive issue if the available housing had been fairly allocated, but instead the crisis 'was exacerbated by social inequality'¹⁶⁷, as cadres, often with the connivance of the enterprise trade union, allocated a disproportionate share of

162 *Xinhua News Agency* (Guangzhou), 14.5.57, 'Some contradictions within the people exposed by the CCP Guangdong Committee', in *SCMP* 1536, 23.5.57, 18. The lack of democracy in factories was the second cause cited.

163 *Ibid.*, 18.

164 *Wenhui Bao* (Hong Kong), 4.2.57, 'Higher standard of living for people of Canton revealed in communique of Statistical Bureau', in *SCMP* 1468, 12.2.57, 21.

165 *Nanfang Ribao* 16.11.56, 2.

166 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 181.

167 *Ibid.*, 183.

any new housing to themselves.¹⁶⁸ It was particularly ironic that, according to statistics from the Municipal Construction Bureau, in 1956 only 8.3% of Guangzhou's construction workers 'had solved their housing problems.'¹⁶⁹ The majority of unmarried workers in the industry who had found accommodation were cadres.¹⁷⁰ This irony was certainly not lost on construction workers themselves, who were the most vociferous critics of the lack of progress in housing provision for workers during the 'Wang Cai' debate.

Workers protested that they and their families were stuck in dangerous, leaking housing while cadres' dependents, and even siblings, had ample accommodation.¹⁷¹ They clearly resented the contrast between cadres' relatively spacious flats and their own cramped dormitories, and the way in which vacant rooms could always be found for new cadres, while there was no space in the already overcrowded and insanitary dormitories for supplementary workers.¹⁷² It did not help that cadres' rent, paid by their enterprise in this case, was ten times as much as that paid for workers' dormitory space. It is evident from workers' statements, and indeed it was officially acknowledged as the 'Wang Cai' debate was brought to a close, that it was not the housing shortage in itself which had provoked so much anger among workers, but rather the unfair allocation of the limited stock.¹⁷³ The crux of the problem was, as ever, the still subordinate position of workers and cadres' isolation from them. One of the first workers to contribute to the debate made the point that all talk about workers having 'stood up' and being 'masters' was

168 Ibid., 183. See also *Guangzhou Ribao* 9.6.57, 2.

169 *Guangzhou Ribao* 4.6.57, 2.

170 Ibid., 2.

171 *Guangzhou Ribao* 29.5.57, 2.

172 *Guangzhou Ribao* 23.5.57, 2.

173 *Guangzhou Ribao* 8.6.57, 2.

meaningless so long as they were still treated unfairly and with disdain by those with power over their lives. ¹⁷⁴

Workers' disillusionment at the injustices of wage reform, the lack of significant improvement in welfare provisions after the nationalization of industry, the decline in democracy in the new joint enterprises, and the failure of the trade unions to defend their rights, contributed to the change in attitude towards work which we noted earlier, with workers adopting the slogan of 'work according to payment'. In doing this they were using 'the only weapon which remained to them, the disposal of their labour power, lowering their performance and imposing their own rhythm of work.' ¹⁷⁵ In Gipouloux's view,

This practice exposed what the mythology which held the political economy in place wished to cover up: the relations of exploitation which bound the working class to the Party. ¹⁷⁶

The policies of the First Five-Year Plan, as we have seen, placed a heavy burden on workers, who by 1956 found that 'pay was meagre, the rhythm of work exhausting, and living conditions deplorable. To say nothing of the exclusion of workers from the whole process of decision-making...' ¹⁷⁷ The last point is particularly important, as participation in management was supposed to be the feature which distinguished socialist enterprises from capitalist ones ¹⁷⁸ and showed

174 *Guangzhou Ribao* 11.4.57, 2.

175 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 173.

176 *Ibid.*, 173.

177 *Ibid.*, 270.

178 See for example Lai Ruoyu, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing), 23.11.56, in *SCMP* 1422, 3.12.56, 3.

that workers really were the 'masters of the enterprise' in some meaningful sense. Yet despite workers' demands for far-reaching democratization and participation in management immediately after liberation, the CCP had held back from full mobilization of workers to achieve these goals, creating tensions in its relationship with workers which fuelled the first major confrontation between them. These same tensions also underlay the second confrontation with its accompanying industrial unrest, and were exacerbated by workers' disappointment and disillusionment at the results of the final nationalization of industry. If workers' democratic rights in state and joint-managed enterprises were ignored and they had no accepted legal means of protesting or of attempting to enforce those rights, then there really was a sense in which they were in a weaker position than had been the case under capitalism or in private enterprises, since in a state enterprise under a communist government, any attempt at self-organization or strike action would be treated as a challenge to the regime, which based its legitimacy on its status as the vanguard of the proletariat.

If the description of relations between the Party and the workers as exploitative sounds extreme, we should remember that in 1956-7, workers were being compelled to work all-out for socialist construction without enjoying the benefits of socialist democracy or the protection of socialist trade unions in the enterprise. It is in this context that some workers' comments that they were freer in the old society, when they could at least vote with their feet and seek work elsewhere if working conditions were intolerable, should be understood. This sort of freedom was officially condemned as 'nothing more than the freedom to sell labour power, the freedom of the wage-slave'¹⁷⁹, but as we have just seen, under the wage and other policies in force in 1956, some workers felt like wage-slaves, in the absence of any concrete

179 Wen Jin, 'How we should view freedom and discipline', *Zhongguo Gongren* 18, September 1956, 10.

manifestation of their theoretical status as 'masters of the enterprise'. The scale of the crisis in the CCP's relationship with the working class is clearly evident from the nearly universal adoption by workers of the so-called 'wage-labour mentality', or 'work according to payment'.

Democracy and the mass line, November 1956 - June 1957

The workers' congress

Distinct signs of a high-level shift in industrial policy emerged from the Eighth Party Congress of September 1956, where the Soviet model of strictly hierarchical one-man management was finally rejected in favour of the mass line in industry and the collective leadership of the enterprise Party committee. The Congress called for the strengthening of mass supervision as part of the 'further broadening of democratic life in China'¹⁸⁰, and decided on the establishment of experimental workers' congresses, consisting of directly elected representatives who could be recalled by workers at any time, as the best means of ensuring the 'expansion of democracy and introduction of the mass-line method of work in state enterprises.'¹⁸¹ Two months later, at a conference of basic-level trade union cadres from joint state-private enterprises, the ACFTU Chairman Lai Ruoyu identified democratization of management as the feature which

180 *Renmin Ribao*, 22.3.57, 'On the question of strengthening mass supervision in enterprises', 1.

181 *Renmin Ribao*, 29.5.57, 'Gradually introduce the system of workers' congresses in state-owned enterprises', in *SCMP* 1547, 11.6.57, 10.

'distinguished socialist enterprises from capitalist ones' ¹⁸², and called on trade unions to 'preserve and improve the system of workers' congresses' ¹⁸³ in order to make workers feel that they really were 'masters of the enterprise'.

This change of policy was clearly designed to avert the danger of serious, open confrontation between restive and alienated workers and the Party and administrative authorities in enterprises and beyond; it was a recognition that policy had gone too far in the direction of only emphasizing production and neglecting democracy, welfare and workers' rights. The decision must also have been influenced by events in Eastern Europe during 1956, which the CCP took as an indication that it could not safely ignore the pressures that were building up in China. The similarity between democratization policies in various parts of the socialist camp has already been noted.

In promoting wider democratization as an antidote to workers' growing discontent, the CCP did in fact reach the heart of the matter, for it was not the fact that China was a relatively poor and under-developed country which provoked so much unrest among the working class, but issues of democracy and equality. Herein lies the political content of workers' protests: these were not just that their living and working conditions were poor and sometimes downright dangerous, but that their requests for modest improvements could be disregarded with bureaucratist indifference by cadres who did not share these hardships, and who even criticized workers for venturing to complain; not just that wages were still low and that there were irrationalities in the system, but that reforms intended to remedy this had been carried out in a

182 Xinhua News Agency (Beijing), 23.11.56, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', in SCMP 1422, 3.12.56, 3.

183 Ibid., 4.

high-handed and sometimes corrupt way which violated all principles of democratic management and workers' participation, and were manipulated by cadres for their own advantage while many workers lost out; not just that there was a serious shortage of housing, but that the limited stock was not allocated according to need, instead being monopolized by a privileged group. In short, the state and Party bureaucracy, right down to the level of enterprise management and including the official unions, had control over virtually all important aspects of workers' lives, including the organizations and institutions through which they were supposed to participate in decision-making and act as the 'masters'. This left workers with no option but to resort to illegal or semi-legal methods to have any influence on the most fundamental issues affecting their lives.

The intention behind proposals for enterprise democratization was to restore and reinvigorate intermediary structures in the enterprise, including the official trade union and a revised version, with more extensive powers, of the sort of participatory structure which had existed in state enterprises after liberation (the WRC) and in private enterprises before nationalization (the production-increase and economy committee). As we saw, the absence of these sorts of intermediary structures had come to mean that rebellious workers quickly came into direct conflict with the Party itself. With the advantages and defects of earlier institutions as a guide, a debate unfolded from the end of 1956 on what the powers of the new democratic body should be, and various models were tried out on an experimental basis in enterprises.

A description of the role and powers of the workers' congress as they emerged from the debate clearly shows its relationship to the earlier workers' representative congress (WRC), although given that it was generally accepted that the WRC had quickly declined into formalism, there was evidently

a need to modify the institution in order to ensure that workers' participation would go beyond 'making a guarantee'¹⁸⁴ at meetings to carry out managers' instructions. Over the seven months from November 1956 to May 1957, the ACFTU's Lai Ruoyu was a consistent advocate of wider and more clearly defined powers for the workers' congress, although these were always conditional on the 'non-violation of plans, decisions and orders of the higher levels'.¹⁸⁵ It was emphasized that if workers and cadres alike were not to feel they were wasting their time at congress meetings, all congress resolutions which met this condition had to be implemented without fail¹⁸⁶, but as we recall from the last section, similar statements were made with regard to the WRC without these good intentions being translated into reality.

Under Lai's proposals, the workers' congress would have the right to take decisions on matters concerning workers' interests and benefits, such as the use of factory bonuses and state appropriations for safety, and the right to 'recommend the appointment and removal of leading officials' and ask for revocation of 'inappropriate' decisions.¹⁸⁷ The congress was also entitled to 'hear reports of the leadership, discuss..., criticize and make proposals'¹⁸⁸, although this

184 See Li Chun, 'Why democracy must be broadened in enterprise management, *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, March 1957, 3; *Renmin Ribao*, 29.5.57, 'Gradually introduce the system of workers' congresses in state-owned enterprises', in *SCMP* 1547, 11.6.57, 10.

185 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing), 23.11.56, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1422, 3.12.56, 3.

186 Zai Heng, 'Develop the supervisory role of the workers' congress', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, June 1957, 7.

187 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, English), 7.3.57, 'Trade union chief on tests of democratic institutions in industry', in *SCMP* 1487, 12.3.57, 22.

188 *Ibid.*, 22.

entitlement was backed by nothing stronger than moral pressure on cadres not to ignore workers' opinions and dismiss their suggestions as they had tended to do in the past. Congress representatives were to be 'nominated and elected by the masses'¹⁸⁹, and in turn management cadres would be 'elected by the workers' congress or the general meeting of all workers.'¹⁹⁰

The workers' congress as formulated by Lai had the additional advantage of providing a useful and positive role for the enterprise trade union committee, which was to act as the standing organ of the congress, organizing the election of delegates, convening the congress regularly, and carrying out its resolutions and day-to-day business when it was not in session. In this way it was hoped that unions would regain the respect and trust of workers and authority in the enterprise: according to Lai, 'the trade union management committee should be a regular organization under the leadership of the workers' congress, and also an organization with authority.'¹⁹¹

Early proposals that workers should elect their factory director¹⁹² had already been rejected by the end of May 1957, when a *Renmin Ribao* editorial stated that

[i]nasmuch as the state enterprises are owned by all the people and not collectively owned by the workers ... the leading administrative personnel of the

189 *Renmin Ribao*, 30.11.56, 'Bring the fighting role of trade unions into play in state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1433, 18.12.56, 4.

190 *Ibid.*, 4.

191 *Xinhua News Agency*, 'The current tasks of trade unions in joint state-private enterprises', in *SCMP* 1422, 3.12.56, 4.

192 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, English), 27.12.56, 'Workers to take greater part in factory management', in *SCMP* 1483, 2.1.57, 17.

enterprise should be appointed by the state administrative organs representing the interests of all the people and should not be elected by the workers' congresses.¹⁹³

This was a rather ominous statement, since we saw earlier that it was precisely this unchallengeable authority of the state representatives which virtually did away with enterprise democracy and workers' participation in management after the nationalization of industry; the leading role of the factory director, the highest state representative in the plant, was identified as the main reason for the FMC's decline into formalism. Similarly, proposals that the workers' congress should be the 'highest administrative organ'¹⁹⁴ in the enterprise, or that it should be on 'an equal footing with the management'¹⁹⁵ were discarded after trials in only a few enterprises.

However, the free election by workers of congress representatives was strongly emphasized: union cadres, who were to oversee the process of nomination and election of candidates, were reminded that although it was important for representatives to be competent, 'it is advisable to make no mention of the required qualifications so that the masses may have a wider latitude in choosing the persons to represent them.'¹⁹⁶ But it should also be noted that elections, like all other congress activities, were subject to higher-level

193 *Renmin Ribao*, 29.5.57, 'Gradually introduce the system of workers' congresses in state-owned enterprises', in *SCMP* 1547, 11.6.57, 11.

194 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, English), 27.12.56, 'Workers to take greater part in factory management', in *SCMP* 1441, 2.1.57, 17.

195 *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, English), 9.1.57, 'Trade union president on factory democracy', in *SCMP* 1449, 14.1.57, 3.

196 *Renmin Ribao*, 29.5.57, 'Pool all wisdom to overcome internal contradictions and to push production forward', in *SCMP* 1547, 11.6.57, 14.

approval and could be strongly influenced by the enterprise Party committee. Cadre interference in elections was evidently still common, although it might be disguised as concern for democracy:

Some people, although they don't say anything to oppose democracy, still don't much trust the masses; they are afraid that the masses' "consciousness is low, their cultural level is very low", "they don't know how to apply democracy", "they raise excessively high demands", and so, at election time, [they think] it is necessary to circulate a list of names and make the masses "pledge" that they will elect these people.... the masses will not be the slightest bit interested in this sort of "democracy", and will not be prepared to act as this sort of "voting machine".¹⁹⁷

This is exactly the same attitude towards elections that we found exhibited by union cadres in the months immediately following liberation, one which aroused a great deal of discontent then among workers who were being deprived of their democratic rights. It should be remembered that these same union officials who were supposed to run democratic elections for workers' congress representatives had themselves been castigated for undemocratic practices and rigging union committee elections early in 1956, something which casts doubt on their ability or inclination to adhere to democratic principles in organizing workers' congresses.

Overall, in spite of the good intentions of at least some of those concerned, no institutional arrangements were put in place during late 1956 and the first half of 1957 which would have enabled the workers' congress to avoid the fate of its predecessors. An article from the *Gongren Ribao* in 1965 on

197 Li Chun, 'Why democracy must be broadened in enterprise management', *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, March 1957, 4.

the strengthening of the congresses shows that they had failed to live up to expectations. It reported that congresses over-emphasised the 'assignment of tasks by leadership and the offer of pledges by the representatives, without adequate attention to...the opinions of the worker masses.'¹⁹⁸ This was exactly the complaint which had been made about the WRC when its replacement by a more effective body was first mooted. The article also revealed that rather than being elected by the workers, 'the workers' representatives were mostly nominated by the leadership. Most of them were cadres.'¹⁹⁹

The campaign against bureaucratism

If there were definite limits to democratization in response to workers' protests, there was, during the first half of 1957, a clear attempt to recognise workers' demands for greater attention to their welfare and their democratic rights as legitimate, and to go some way towards meeting these demands. Since it could not be admitted that most of the difficulties workers were experiencing, in terms of livelihood as well as democratic participation, were directly attributable to deliberate Party and state policy decisions (one-man management, nationalization and reorganization of enterprises, wage reform, piece-work and the setting of norms, the emphasis on production at the expense of welfare and even safety; the whole direction of the First Five-Year Plan, in fact), the campaign had to be cast in terms which would stress problems in the application of policy at the lower level, i.e. in the enterprise.

As was noted in the previous section, the CCP took a

198 Gongren Ribao, 13.10.65, 'Metallurgical workers of Shenyang improve system of workers' congresses', in SCMP 3576, 10.11.65, 11.

199 Ibid., 11.

similar line when opposition to the policy of 'benefitting both labour and capital' among workers reached serious levels, blaming mistakes by union cadres, who had in fact followed Party guidelines to the letter, rather than the fact that this sort of reformist policy could never be accepted by many workers. Now, even the fundamental question of the proper relationship between leaders and led in a socialist society was to be tackled in terms of errors in basic-level application of policy, hence the emphasis in so many articles on democratization on the problems caused by cadres' bureaucratism and authoritarianism, and the combination, from March 1957, of the revived Hundred Flowers movement with an open rectification movement.

One of the more authoritative analyses of the labour unrest of 1956-7, the *Renmin Ribao* editorial 'On labour trouble'²⁰⁰, closely followed Mao's line on the handling of non-antagonistic contradictions, and identified cadre bureaucratism as the main cause of the unrest. While insisting that 'the fundamental interests of the leaders are identical with [those] of the worker masses'²⁰¹, the article acknowledged that there was a possibility of conflict between partial and overall, or immediate and long-term, interests. Bearing this in mind, the article reminded cadres that if workers made demands, they should listen to them and decide whether or not they were reasonable and could feasibly be granted. All reasonable and feasible demands should be met; in the case of those demands which were not reasonable, or which could not at present be met for practical reasons, it was vital that cadres explained to the workers exactly why this was so, because it was not when workers' demands were turned down that they resorted to strikes and other disruptive activities, but when they were turned down and no convincing

200 *Renmin Ribao*, 13.5.57, 'On labour trouble', in *SCMP* 1536, 23.5.57, 1-3.

201 *Ibid.*, 1.

explanation was forthcoming.

Cadres were particularly warned against arrogance and dishonesty towards workers; it was noted in another article that some leading cadres 'behaved in the presence of the masses as if the leadership were infallible.'²⁰² Cadres who 'put on airs and [told] lies to the masses' failed to keep their promises and lacked proper concern for workers' welfare:

Over problems of vital interest to the masses, the deeds of leaders do not correspond to their words and their disposal of things is not fair. All such [actions] will cause serious discontent among the masses.²⁰³

We have already seen that this sort of behaviour was extremely common, and that it did indeed provoke great anger and bitterness among workers. However, decisions on 'problems of vital interest to the masses' were not solely the province of the basic-level cadres at whom these criticisms were aimed: at the heart of workers' discontent was the fact that the CCP's own 'words did not conform to its deeds', as the supposed 'masters' of the state and the enterprise were still largely powerless unless they were prepared to resort to extreme methods.

Precisely in order to avoid this eventuality, cadres were also warned against resorting to repression to deal with the workers, since prohibiting the expression of workers' discontent would merely 'aggravate the contradiction behind the trouble instead of solving it.'²⁰⁴ The very fact that workers had found themselves compelled to use such methods as

202 *Renmin Ribao*, 5.5.57, quoted in Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 193.

203 *Renmin Ribao*, 'On labour trouble', *SCMP* 1536, 2.

204 *Ibid.*, 2.

strikes and go-slows showed that cadres were at fault, since they must have disregarded the first rumblings of discontent and failed to keep in close contact with the workers so as to understand their mood. Trade union cadres were particularly culpable on this point, since they were supposed to provide the link between the Party and the workers. Facilitating communication between the two was one of the main tasks of the large networks of union activists in enterprises:

Only someone who lives among the masses can understand them most clearly. Trade union activists are themselves workers and staff, and so they can report everyone's demands to the trade union, and thus make it easier for the trade union to act on everyone's behalf.²⁰⁵

But as we have seen, trade union activists at this point were so badly demoralized that few were willing or able to make much effort in the job, and at the level of the trade union hierarchy where cadres actually had some influence which could be exercised on workers' behalf, i.e. the enterprise trade union leadership, cadres were often just as out of touch as administrative cadres, and were inclined to side with the latter against the workers. Hence workers' adoption of more forceful means of expressing their discontent.

Some gave these union cadres the benefit of the doubt, believing that if they had been in touch with actual working conditions they would have intervened to protect workers' interests when these were threatened by administrative action²⁰⁶, but that 'due to bureaucracy, [they did] not feel

205 Liu Shi, 'The glorious responsibility of trade union activists', *Zhongguo Gongren* 24, December 1956, 10.

206 *Renmin Ribao*, 9.5.57, 'On an 8,000 li tour of hurried observation', in *SCMP* 1551, 17.6.57, 10.

the masses' hardship as they [did] their own.'²⁰⁷ Some workers might have put it more bluntly, blaming not just bureaucratism, but the fact that cadres sat in their offices all day pen-pushing and had superior housing, welfare benefits and other privileges which came with their positions to prevent them from 'feeling the masses' hardship as their own'.²⁰⁸ In any case, given the widely acknowledged weakness of the union in the enterprise hierarchy, it is to say the least doubtful that union action in defence of workers' rights would have been successful even if the union leadership had been fully aware of workers' problems. The claim that trade union cadres were themselves too bureaucratist to be able to correct management bureaucratism, and contributed to contradictions within the working class rather than resolving them²⁰⁹, probably also has some truth in it.

While the debate on bureaucratism, democracy and how best to enable the 'masters of the enterprise' to participate in management went on, fuelled by workers' demands for democratic management²¹⁰, the industrial unrest which had gained momentum during 1956 continued unabated in Guangzhou and seemingly in every other major Chinese city. We have already seen that some workers made explicit reference to events in Hungary when discussing their motives for this sort of direct action, and that this was in keeping with the general mood of militancy in Chinese enterprises where 'creating disturbances'

207 *Renmin Ribao*, 13.5.57, 'On labour trouble', in *SCMP* 1536, 2.

208 See for example the letter from Chen Qing of the Huanan Sewing Machine Factory, *Guangzhou Ribao* 11.5.57, 2.

209 See for example 'On the correct handling of contradictions within the rank of the working class', *Xinjiang Ribao*, 9.5.57, in *Union Research Service* 8, 12, 9.8.57, 223.

210 See *Union Research Service* 8, 12, particularly 225, 228, and 232; Li Chun, 'Why democracy must be broadened in enterprise management', *Zhongguo Gongren* 6, March 1957, 4.

was gaining ground as the only effective means of putting pressure on the leadership. Chinese reports of the Hungarian unrest stressed that the strikes there were not supported by all workers, involved a great deal of violence and damage to property, and were organized by illegal workers' organizations which had been ordered to disband²¹¹, thus signalling official disapproval of the events, but these reports did mean that workers in China were well aware that strikes were taking place elsewhere in the socialist camp, and knew in broad terms what was behind the disputes, namely leadership bureaucratism. This knowledge may well have acted as an encouragement to Chinese workers, particularly as articles in the labour movement press were sometimes more sympathetic towards events in Eastern Europe.²¹²

April 1957 was a particularly eventful month in Guangzhou, with the publication of Wang Cai's letter coinciding with two major industrial conflicts which 'had in common their origin: the autocratic style of management and the harshness of working conditions.'²¹³ The first incident, at the Nanjiang Steelworks, reflected the impact of the nationalization of industry, as it was said that management at the plant had been particularly lax since the arrival of state representatives.

The immediate cause of the April incident was management's failure to pay workers who had worked on a public holiday, but this seems just to have been the spark which set light to months of accumulated resentment:

For a long time, workers' demands had been systematically ignored by the leadership. The

211 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 13.12.56, 4.

212 See for example 'How to understand the Hungarian Incident', *Zhongguo Gongren* 22, November 1956, 8.

213 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs A L'Usine*, 194.

blunders of the administrative staff aggravated the tension: it was not unusual for workshop heads to make deductions from workers' pay during stoppages [due to breakdowns]. ²¹⁴

On April 10, 1957, workers drew up a petition demanding the pay that was owed to them and, bursting into the factory director's office, compelled the deputy director to sign it and to accompany them to the headquarters of the industrial corporation to present the petition, in what was reported to be 'an extremely tense atmosphere'. ²¹⁵ At this point the enterprise's administration and Party and union committees became involved, as did the local district committee, and negotiations were begun which after more than two weeks completely vindicated the workers. As part of the agreement, 'cadres promised to go down to the workshops more often' ²¹⁶, showing that this dispute, like so many others, was blamed in part on cadres' bureaucratism and lack of knowledge of actual conditions in the enterprise.

It was accepted that earlier instances of unprincipled behaviour on the part of the management had led the Nanjiang workers to conclude that only direct action in the form of creating disturbances could get results. A vicious circle thus came into being, as the administration, well aware of workers' readiness to cause disturbances in pursuit of their demands, became afraid of 'giving full play to democracy', as the slogan went, and thereby provoked even greater dissatisfaction among the workers by its undemocratic and secretive conduct, which dissatisfaction found expression in more disturbances, and so on. The administration's fear of involving workers in decision-making led it to attempt 'closed-door' wage reform, resulting in prolonged protests and

214 Ibid., 195.

215 *Guangzhou Ribao* 14.5.57, 1.

216 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 195.

simmering discontent after wage-grades and promotions were decided by a 'small group' of Party, administrative and union cadres and the list simply posted for workers to read. Since the lack of democracy in the enterprise seemed to be the crux of the problem, the solution recommended was self-criticism, first by cadres and then by members of the workers' 'delegation', and the promotion of the workers' congress, which had yet to be established in many Guangzhou enterprises.²¹⁷

The second major dispute in Guangzhou during the spring developed on the docks, the site of much conflict immediately after liberation. Here, '[c]adres' intransigence and the harshness of working conditions provoked growing absenteeism.'²¹⁸ It was reported that in April only 75% of workers were at work²¹⁹, and according to Li Xiuren's report on his '8,000 li tour' in May, only 40% were working.²²⁰ 'The reason for these defections was simple: dockers who were paid piece-rates earned less than those on sick-leave (which guaranteed them 75% of basic wages).'²²¹ Workers may not actually have called a strike, but this deliberate, mass absenteeism amounted to the same thing. The main bone of contention on the docks was the new shift system which had been imposed in spite of workers' protests. This system forced workers to work eight hours on, eight hours off for two days, after which they would get one day off. The sixteen-hour day left workers overworked and exhausted, and so unable

217 *Guangzhou Ribao* 14.5.57, 1.

218 *Ibid.*, 196.

219 *Guangzhou Ribao* 15.6.57, 1.

220 *Gongren Ribao* 9.5.57, 2. The *Nanfang Ribao* (19.5.57) stated that attendance fell to 60% at its lowest.

221 *Ibid.*, 196.

to earn a decent wage on the piece-rate system²²² as the highest rates were earned for the most physically demanding tasks; it also caused an increase in accidents and work-related illness among workers.²²³

Not only did the dockers' trade union not object to this new system, 'on the contrary, [the union] helped the administration devise ways and means... to compel the workers to go to work.'²²⁴ In one of the more blatant examples of the union failing in its duty to protect workers' health and safety in the face of excessive demands from the administration, the union assisted management by preventing doctors from signing workers off on sick leave²²⁵, and acquiesced in the increase of penalties for absence and the imposition of tighter regulations on absence, under which workers who were just five minutes late would be locked out for the entire day, unable to earn any wages.²²⁶ Workers were punished for stopping work by being made to spend an entire eight-hour shift at the personnel department undertaking 'self-criticism'; they received no wage for this time, just a meal allowance of fifty fen.²²⁷

Workers also had other grievances, about the management of social and medical services (the clinic dispensary opened an hour after work began, making it difficult for workers to find time to visit it), and about housing; new housing built by the workers themselves, heeding the official line that they

222 Renmin Ribao, 9.5.57, 'On an 8,000 li tour of hurried observation', in SCMP 1551, 17.6.57, 10; Gongren Ribao, 9.5.57, 2.

223 Gongren Ribao 9.5.57, 2; Nanfang Ribao 19.5.57, 1.

224 Ibid., 2.

225 Ibid., 2.

226 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 197.

227 Nanfang Ribao 19.5.57, 1.

should not rely on the state for everything, had been occupied by government employees.²²⁸ In May, the striking dockers 'gave themselves over to a closely-argued criticism ... of the administration and its practices.'²²⁹ Of the 160 grievances which they identified, almost half (73) were to do with regulations, work discipline and cadres' workstyle, while 40 concerned wages and excessively high norms, 30 health, hygiene and labour insurance matters, and 17 housing, canteens and welfare.²³⁰

These represented a familiar picture of workers' discontent in 1956 and 1957, reflecting the basic problem of workers' lack of influence in the enterprise. Once again we see how workers were powerless in the face of unfair housing allocation and unrealistic norms which drove down incomes, set by cadres who had quickly forgotten what hard physical labour was like once they gained their position.²³¹ The lack of democratic consultation, unions' siding with the administration against the workers, the application of illegal and arbitrary punishments when workers objected to the new regime - all these forms of behaviour had been criticized in the press for more than a year, and a shift in policy in the direction of acknowledging and correcting these defects had long since been signalled by no less an authority than the Eighth Party Congress, yet down on the docks, and on many other shop floors, it seemed very little had changed. Workers' letters during the 'Wang Cai' debate are full of the same problems and injustices which were exposed by the short-lived 'welfare wind' of the previous year, which still remained unsolved.

228 Ibid., 197.

229 Ibid., 196.

230 Guangzhou Ribao 15.6.57, 1.

231 Li Xiuren singled out two union vice-chairs, former dockers, for particular criticism in this respect.

From the proportion of dock workers' complaints which concerned cadres' workstyle and regulations we can perhaps see why it was that democratization and the much-vaunted system of workers' congresses had had little effect. Looking at the above description of how the dispute developed, it is easy to see that cadres, including trade union cadres, behaved in an extremely high-handed and autocratic way, changing rules and imposing fines and punishments on workers in an attempt to force them to comply with the new organization of work. This is the sort of behaviour attributed to bureaucrats and capitalists in the old society, and closely resembles the criticisms of one-man management made in early 1956. It is hard to reconcile with the official insistence that workers and cadres were political equals, with their different roles in the enterprise merely reflecting the division of labour necessary in a modern industrial organization; it is equally difficult to see how, with cadres taking this attitude, any mechanism for democratic participation by workers in management could be made to work, if it did not include any provision for forcing cadres to listen to and take note of workers' opinions and demands, but simply relied on their good faith, as the workers' congress ultimately did.

On the subject of the workers' congress, it is interesting to note that the revised norms which caused so much discontent on the docks had, the leadership argued, been passed by the workers' congress. Many norms had been raised by as much as 18% while most unit prices were reduced, meaning that it was difficult for many workers to achieve the new standards, and even those who could earned less than they had for the same level of production the previous year.²³² Workers countered that the decision had only been passed by their representatives 'under duress' and in a formalistic way, i.e without real discussion and agreement. This seems to indicate that the workers' congress could actually be used

232 *Nanfang Ribao* 19.5.57, 1.

against workers, with resolutions forced through it on the basis of dubious management findings²³³ then presented to workers as 'their own' decisions.

In May the leadership on the docks, alarmed by 'absenteeism [and] the collapse of productivity'²³⁴, brought in reforms which met some of the workers' demands, specifically those on work norms, medical care and welfare, and regulations on absence from work and lateness; other matters were referred to the higher level for resolution.²³⁵ The cadres deemed responsible for the work stoppages and losses in productivity were criticised, for as workers pointed out, 'if the leadership had listened to us a little earlier, production would not have been damaged.'²³⁶ One more characteristic feature of this dispute is that nowhere is there any mention of trade union involvement in its resolution: 'everything was played out between the pressure of the workers and the higher levels of the Party hierarchy.'²³⁷

Workers vs. cadres: the failure of democratic reform

By May 1957, the debate on democracy and bureaucratism was threatening to go far beyond what the CCP could tolerate and still maintain its legitimacy. In the previous section, we saw how workers' demands for extended democratization foundered on leadership fears of 'extreme democratization.' In the case of the Democratic Reform Movement, cadres'

233 Workers claimed the new norms had been arrived at after hasty and partial observation of their work by inspection staff.

234 Ibid., 197.

235 Guangzhou Ribao 15.6.57, 1.

236 Ibid., 1.

237 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 198.

reluctance fully to mobilize workers for fear that they would take the movement to extremes resulted in workers' losing interest in the campaign, and even when the Five-Anti movement allowed workers' demands to come to the fore again, the Party was able to regain control fairly quickly. But in this second confrontation over the issue, the fact of widespread industrial unrest, with workers' protests directed not at 'feudal elements' or capitalists, but at the Party and state bureaucracy itself, sharpened the conflict considerably.

Although no actual opposition to management democratization and the workers' congress is evident in the press between November 1956 and June 1957, we have already seen how the more far-reaching proposals were dropped after very limited trials in a few enterprises, and it was not long before fears that the reforms would unleash 'extreme democratization' surfaced again.²³⁸ As had happened at the Nanjiang Steelworks, the reluctance on the part of enterprise leaders to broaden democracy as a means of defusing workers' discontent led them into repressive measures which actually exacerbated that discontent. When the officially approved, democratic channels for dealing with their grievances were thus denied to workers, they resorted to other methods, including mass absenteeism, strikes etc., which in turn confirmed leaders' fears of workers' militancy and extremist tendencies and reinforced their inclination to respond with authoritarian measures, provoking a further escalation in the unrest. Given that this was workers' reaction to attempts to limit democracy in enterprises, it became clear that workers' congresses could only be successful if workers were genuinely permitted to speak out freely and exercise their democratic rights; if this demand was not met, not only would they swiftly abandon the organization, but their discontent would have been intensified.²³⁹

238 *Gongren Ribao* 17.4.57, 3.

239 See *Gongren Ribao* 13.5.57, 2.

The official trade unions must take some of the responsibility for the escalating conflict in industry at this time. It seems likely that the unions' reputation among workers, which reached a new low during 1956-7, helped to discredit the system of workers' congresses before it was even fully implemented. There is evidence of opposition to the proposal to make the union committee the standing organ of the congress²⁴⁰, with some workers concerned that congress resolutions would be meaningless if their implementation was left to such an ineffective and untrustworthy organization. Once it was decided that the union committee would definitely take this role, workers' hopes of exerting significant influence in the enterprise through the workers' congress must have faded somewhat, leaving them to continue with the more direct method of pressing their demands through industrial unrest.

No-one was more aware of the precarious position of the unions at this point than the unions themselves. Li Xiuren, deputy head of the ACFTU's General Office, concluded from his tour of cities on the Beijing-Wuhan-Guangzhou railway line that 'the unions have lost the masses. With the unions separated from the masses to this extent, how can it be anything but a crisis in union work?'²⁴¹ This 'crisis' caused Li Xiuren, Gao Yuan and others to begin to formulate a role for the unions in which they would concern themselves mainly or exclusively with the interests and demands of the workers, without the usual riders about the identity of their long-term interests with those of the state; in other words, the unions would now side with the workers rather than with the Party or administration.²⁴²

240 *Gongren Ribao* 11.1.57, 1; 25.2.57, 1'

241 *Gongren Ribao* 9.5.57, 1.

242 See the attacks on Gao Yuan's ideas in *Gongren Ribao* 22.10.57, 1; 11.11.57, 3; 12.11.57, 3; 19.11.57, 2.

This change in attitude within the unions is illustrated by the growing tendency during the spring of 1957 for unions to condone workers' resort to usually unacceptable methods of expressing their discontent and gaining concessions. The view gained ground that workers who resorted to strike action

sometimes ... have no choice but to act in this way. It would be best if it didn't happen at all. Because it affects production, it actually damages the workers themselves. But once this sort of incident has occurred, cadres should not blame the masses too much, as strikes and disruptions are often provoked by bureaucratism, and cadres should adopt the methods of broadening democracy and following the mass line to solve them.²⁴³

Even with the authority for this response to unrest coming ultimately from Mao himself, most cadres still took a far harder line than the unions on even those actions by workers which were perfectly legal, such as the independent organization of delegations to present petitions to higher-level organs.²⁴⁴ The opprobrium heaped on Gao Yuan later in the year for having said strikes were a good method of combatting leadership bureaucratism²⁴⁵ shows how quickly this sort of tolerance came to be regarded as counter-revolutionary, suggesting perhaps that support for it had never been wholehearted.

243 'How to handle internal contradictions in the enterprise correctly?', *Zhongguo Gongren* 11, June 1957, 4.

244 See *Gongren Ribao* 23.4.57, 1.

245 *Gongren Ribao* 11.11.57, 3. Mao never went so far as to describe strikes as a good method, but approved of them as a last resort after criticism of bureaucratism had failed. However, he warned delegates at a January 1957 conference not to go back to their own regions and 'say that there was a meeting in Beijing and now the whole country can go on strike (laughter)... and say that I said so...' (Mao Zedong *Sixiang Wansui*, 94).

In May 1957, union cadres, including the ACFTU head Lai Ruoyu, also began to turn their attention publicly towards the problems at the higher levels of their organizations, rather than focusing exclusively on the work-style defects of grassroots cadres ²⁴⁶, and in this they both echoed the opinion of increasing numbers of workers ²⁴⁷ (in a deliberate attempt to regain their allegiance), and gave further impetus to the widening of the debate, which now threatened to spread to include all aspects of the CCP's policies towards workers. The beginnings of a shift in unions' attitude brought predictable Party accusations of economism and syndicalism later in the year, and a purge of union leadership similar to that which took place in 1951-2.

The most striking characteristic of the many accounts of conflict between workers and the authorities during this second period of confrontation is the palpable sense of division, hostility and mistrust between workers and cadres which permeates them all. It is at the root of this division that we will find the reasons why an underlying conflict in the Party's relationship with the working class which had been shelved, apparently successfully, for three years burst into the open again during 1956. One reason, of particular relevance to Guangzhou because of the size of the remaining private sector in that city, was undoubtedly the final nationalization of industry in that year, with its advance propaganda which led workers to expect a dramatic improvement in their material lives ²⁴⁸ contradicted by actual events, as workers in these enterprises in many cases found themselves worse off in terms of welfare, pay, and democratic participation after the transformation.

246 *Gongren Ribao* 11.5.57, 1; 18.5.57, 3.

247 See workers' comments on unions in *Gongren Ribao* 21, 22, 29.5.57.

248 *Guangzhou Ribao* 19.4.57, 2.

Yet this cannot be the only reason for the outbreaks of unrest in Guangzhou and elsewhere, which seem to have been far more serious than anything which occurred during the first confrontation after liberation. There is of course the point that there were no longer any significant groups such as capitalists or 'feudal remnants' against whom protests could be directed; the target of workers' animosity now would always ultimately be the CCP, which meant that industrial unrest and strikes, still legal but not approved of, took on more serious political overtones. But conflict also escalated in the old state enterprises during this second confrontation, so we must look further for its causes.

The division of workers from cadres was widely recognized as a problem during the final phase of the Hundred Flowers movement, but analyses of this division tended to stop at the level of work-style and attitude. One article on workers' congresses carried the headline, 'What is the most outstanding contradiction within the working class? The leadership's bureaucratist workstyle and the workers' demands for extended democracy' ²⁴⁹, and this was a typical conclusion. But there were signs, as the confrontation reached a climax in the spring of 1957, that deeper questions of political and social inequality were behind the split. Workers were not simply protesting that cadres behaved as if they were old-style bureaucrats or capitalists, bossing workers about and treating them with disdain, but that they actually possessed power over workers' lives which allowed them to take decisions in an autocratic and arbitrary way, and that workers had no legitimate power available to them to counteract this. This is why workers rejected the workers' congress as soon as it became apparent that it would not be allowed to become an institution with real power in the enterprise, and instead went back to the illegitimate methods of industrial unrest and causing disturbances which seemed to them to be the only ones

249 Gongren Ribao 13.5.57, 2.

which had any effect.

This imbalance of power was of course not a new development, but the more time passed after liberation, and the more the Party's reputation became tarnished by cadre privilege and the failure of improvements in workers' conditions to keep pace with improvements in production, the more starkly it appeared. Some cadres still attempted to hark back to the early days of revolutionary struggle and sacrifice to demonstrate how little workers now had to complain about, but this was not a successful tactic. When workers in a Guangzhou machine works asked for improved ventilation in a workshop where temperatures regularly reached 110° (more in the summer), they were rebuked by a cadre who reminded them that

When the Red Army was on the Long March, they managed to survive by eating tree bark, and you're saying when it's a bit warm in the workshop you can't work? ²⁵⁰

Coming from a cadre with an electric fan in his office, this remark provoked outrage rather than a shamefaced withdrawal of the demand. The constant exhortations to workers not to rely on the state for everything also risked an angry response, as workers were not slow to point out that if anyone relied on the state for everything, it was the cadres, with their special sanatoria and cadres-only canteens; they, not workers, were 'entering communism ahead of schedule', as the joke went, with everything provided for them according to need. ²⁵¹

All the different points of contention in this second confrontation, then, from corrupt and undemocratic practices during wage reform, unfair housing allocation, and the failure of promised welfare benefits to materialize, to the criticism,

250 Guangzhou Ribao 17.5.57, 2.

251 Gongren Ribao 21.5.57, 2.

labelling, and punishment of workers expressing legitimate grievances, came down to this inequality of power. The Party never admitted it, and even at the height of the conflict workers too spoke mainly of attitudes and work-styles, but their ready resort to withdrawing their labour and organizing themselves shows their awareness of their own lack of power if they kept to the structures of participation and representation which had been set up for them. They quickly realized that the new system of workers' congresses would not give them any real authority in the enterprise, and so rejected it; some refused even to elect representatives.²⁵²

The anti-rightist campaign: the end of 'blooming and contending'?

One view of Mao's motive in launching the Hundred Flowers movement is that it was intended to trick his rightist opponents into revealing themselves; this is the motive which in fact was claimed for it at the beginning of the anti-rightist campaign in June 1957. Another view, perhaps more plausible, is that Mao, in common with other top leaders, was not aware of the depth of feeling which the call to outsiders to criticise the Party might unleash. It is certainly hard to believe that the CCP leadership was fully aware of the depth of the division between workers and their leaders, since it seems to have attempted to paper over the cracks with a revised version of democratic institutions which had failed in the past and token participation in physical labour on the part of cadres.²⁵³ But whatever the original intention, it became clear by the beginning of June 1957 that criticism of the CCP regime had reached dangerous levels, and with the lesson of the Hungarian Incident fresh in the leadership's

252 *Nanfang Ribao* 3.6.57, 1.

253 See *Gongren Ribao* 1.5.57, 1; 3.5.57, 2; 4.5.57, 1.

minds, the anti-rightist campaign was launched on June 8.

The targets of the anti-rightist campaign were all intellectuals of one sort or another. The fact that only a few union leaders were officially branded as rightists and punished for their activities during the Hundred Flowers period has given the impression that workers did not suffer any reprisals once the brief interval of liberalization and democracy had come to an end, being involved in the anti-rightist campaign only to the extent that they 'spoke out' at meetings organized to condemn the main rightists. One of the first articles to report veteran workers' criticism of rightist intellectuals was somewhat disingenuously titled 'Workers start to speak up' ²⁵⁴; workers had of course been doing precisely this for some months, but not in support of the Party. No explicit reference was made during the campaign to the industrial unrest of the preceding eighteen months which had exposed the crisis in the Party's relationship with the working class, although some of the points made as veteran workers compared their lives before and after liberation touched on the issues involved: for example, claims by intellectuals that the CCP was exploitative and lived in luxury at the expense of ordinary people were refuted, but with no hint that broadly the same conclusions had been reached by many workers. ²⁵⁵

But even if it was not publicly acknowledged, given what we know about their scale and seriousness it is not credible that workers' criticisms of the Party and protest actions escaped punitive measures. As early as January 1957, long before the anti-rightist campaign began, Mao had warned provincial and municipal Party secretaries that nothing short of a counter-revolutionary revolt should be met with armed force, but the very fact that such a warning against 'the

254 *Renmin Ribao* 10.6.57, in *SCMP* 1553, 6.

255 *Guangzhou Ribao* 10.6.57, 1.

methods of the GMD' ²⁵⁶ (such as mass arrests and firing on demonstrators) was necessary shows how disturbances were likely to be dealt with. Once the anti-rightist campaign began, it was much easier to brand anyone involved in disturbances as a counter-revolutionary (particularly if they had violated the conditions for legitimate criticism laid down in the revised version of Mao's speech on contradictions among the people, which was only now published), and thus to resort to harsher repressive measures. Workers, and some union activists, were in fact imprisoned and sent to labour camps in the aftermath of the Hundred Flowers movement, and some were executed ²⁵⁷, but they were distinguished from the intellectuals by being labelled 'bad elements' ²⁵⁸ rather than rightists, a term which has criminal rather than political connotations. This repression seems to have had a lasting impact: memories of this period are adduced by a Guangzhou Red Guard, Dai Xiao'ai, as a reason for the reluctance of most workers to get involved in political campaigns in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. ²⁵⁹

However, there was no immediate cessation of the rumblings of discontent from workers; these continued sporadically until the end of the year, and were accompanied by further promotion of democratization and the establishment of workers' congresses, and by a rectification campaign in enterprises in the autumn of 1957 which consisted chiefly of criticism of enterprise leaders by workers as a means of correcting the former's bureaucratist errors. In this way, the CCP attempted to deal harshly with those it considered

256 Mao Zedong *Sixiang Wansui!*, 88.

257 See Chan, 'Revolution or corporatism?', 33, and *Union Research Service* 9, 20, 6.12.57, 'Workers made to pay for mistaken ideas about striking'.

258 See Chan, *ibid.*, 33.

259 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard - the political autobiography of Dai Hsiao-ai*, 56.

most culpable, whose words and actions had gone far beyond what was permissible, and to make some limited concessions to the rest who had not gone so far and whose grievances were recognized as legitimate. But to keep this campaign under control, it was coupled with a 'systematic socialist propaganda and education movement' ²⁶⁰ which was intended to strengthen political and ideological education of workers. The same newspaper which announced this campaign in Guangzhou had a few months earlier ridiculed the leadership on the docks for resorting to the 'talisman' of political and ideological education to suppress fully justified protests by workers ²⁶¹, showing the change in atmosphere which had taken place. The appearance of democratization given by the methods to be used in the campaign, such as 'great debates' and 'free airing of views' ²⁶², is belied by the subject matter prescribed for it, namely the correct relationships between democracy and centralism, freedom and discipline, individual and collective interests, etc.. Organized discussion of these issues had long been the standard method of peacefully suppressing unrest among workers.

Reports on the progress of the campaign throughout the second half of 1957 show how the sharp conflict between workers and cadres which had dominated the preceding six months rumbled on. While workers' 'candid and incisive' ²⁶³ criticisms of their leaders in *dazibao* were praised by visiting higher-level officials, such as the provincial Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang ²⁶⁴, they were evidently a little too candid for some of the cadres to whom they referred, who had reportedly restricted the development of the movement by

260 *Nanfang Ribao* 12.9.57, 2.

261 *Nanfang Ribao* 19.5.57, 1.

262 *Nanfang Ribao* 12.9.57, 2.

263 *Nanfang Ribao* 5.10.57, 2.

264 *Nanfang Ribao* 11.10.57, 1.

failing to dispel workers' suspicions that the invitation to speak out was some sort of trap²⁶⁵. Some had also prevented certain *dazibao* from being put up, covered them up or even destroyed them, and had taken reprisals against their critics.²⁶⁶ But despite the persistence of some workers in asking the difficult questions about who really was the master of the enterprise, workers or the Party, by the time of the Eighth ACFTU Congress in December 1957, the CCP's application of 'repression, persuasion or concession'²⁶⁷ had been largely successful in bringing to a close this second period of confrontation.

Conclusions

Stemming from the same basic contradiction in workers' relationship with the Party as the first confrontation between the two, but taking it a stage further in terms of both political ideas and methods of action, this second confrontation can be seen in some respects as transitional, linking the first outbreak of conflict between workers and the CCP with the third, the Cultural Revolution. Where workers in the early 1950s had criticized their official unions, in 1956-7 they ignored them altogether, preferring to organize themselves in the event of a dispute and confront the Party directly, and during the Cultural Revolution, such was the degree of animosity felt by workers with regard to the unions that they actually ceased to operate for some years. Similarly, the forms of management democratization offered to protesting workers with limited success immediately after liberation were summarily rejected in the second confrontation, as workers began to pose more probing questions

265 *Nanfang Ribao* 25.10.57, 1. Gipouloux notes that in a union survey of workers in Harbin, 17% harboured this suspicion (*Les Cent Fleurs*, 247).

266 *Nanfang Ribao* 25.10.57, 1.

267 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 256.

about who the masters of the enterprise really were, and by 1966-7 the debate had moved on altogether, from participation in management by workers to 'mass management' with workers in the dominant position. Thus these periodic confrontations, all rooted in the same basic conflict, escalated with each reoccurrence and became progressively harder for the CCP to control.

The shift of attention from questions of attitude and workstyle to actual inequalities of power and their consequences, which we have identified as the major element distinguishing this second, more serious confrontation from its predecessor, brings us in turn to an idea which would become increasingly important in discussions of the conflict between workers and their leaders, playing a vital role in particular in the third confrontation which began with the launch of the Cultural Revolution. This is the idea that the bureaucracy, including its lowest level, the enterprise bureaucracy, can constitute a new 'class' wielding political power over the workers.

The idea that cadres could become detached from workers and begin to act as a privileged class as the process of bureaucratic routinization set in was behind one of the most important policies in industry during the Great Leap Forward, that of the 'two participations', i.e. the participation of workers in management and of cadres in manual labour; the latter, the beginnings of which we have already seen as part of the Party's response to rebellious workers in 1957, was particularly strongly emphasized. A rather defensive theoretical article published in December 1957, before this policy really began to be promoted, provided tacit acknowledgement of the dangers inherent in the division of labour, claiming that

It is true that, comparatively speaking, the

personnel of state organs do not take a direct part in productive labour but directly exercise the administrative power, while the people take a direct part in productive labour and do not directly exercise administrative power. But it does not follow from this that the personnel of the state organs form a privileged class standing above the people and that the contradictions between the Government and the people are the contradictions between this so-called "privileged class" and the people who do not enjoy such privilege. ²⁶⁸

But in spite of protestations that the socialist ownership of the means of production would prevent such an occurrence, during the Socialist Education Movement in the early sixties the danger of the emergence of a new bureaucratic class was frequently mentioned by Mao. He warned that

If the management staff do not go down to the [production] teams in workshops, practice "three togethernesses" [with workers], and treat workers as teachers and learn [from them], they will end up in a fierce, life-long class struggle with the working class. Eventually they as the bourgeois class will be defeated by the working class. ²⁶⁹

As Maurice Meisner has described it,

In a society that has abolished private property and private ownership of the means of production, Mao early recognized that the principal social

268 Fu Rong, 'My understanding of the contradictions among the people under the socialist system', *Xuexi* 24, 18.12.57, in *Extracts from China Mainland Magazines* (ECMM) 123, 17.3.58, 20.

269 Quoted in Peter Nan-shong Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform in China, 1949-1984*, 100.

contradiction is no longer primarily economic but rather political, the elemental distinction between those who hold political power and those who do not, ... between (as Mao put it in 1957) the leadership and the led. From there he was inexorably driven to the conclusion that China's bureaucrats were becoming a new exploiting class ... "bourgeois elements sucking the blood of the workers" - in effect, a functional (albeit propertyless) bourgeoisie able to exploit society and appropriate much of the fruits of social labour by virtue of the political power they wielded.²⁷⁰

Much more will be said about the debate on exploitation and class in the context of relations between workers and enterprise authorities in later sections, and in particular with reference to the Cultural Revolution. For now it is sufficient to note these ideas were already beginning to be expressed by restive workers in 1956-7, indicating the seriousness of the crisis in their relationship with the Party only seven years after liberation.

The 1956-7 industrial unrest cannot be dismissed as merely another outbreak of economism among workers²⁷¹. Studies of workers in other socialist countries point out that the 'latent political content and overt political significance'²⁷² of such activities as absenteeism and go-slows should not be disregarded even if they are prompted by mainly economic demands. In Eastern Europe it appears that among workers,

270 Meisner, 'The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Chinese Marxist thought', in Nee and Moringo (eds), *State and society in contemporary China*, 123.

271 Paul Harper describes it in these terms in 'Party and unions', 100.

272 Alex Pravda, 'Political attitudes and activity', in Triska and Gati (eds.), *Blue-collar workers*, 56.

dissatisfaction with economic progress promote[d] political and social dissatisfaction that tend[ed] to spill over quickly into more radical worker demands for political and workplace liberalization, especially in the form of workers' councils.²⁷³

We can see the beginnings of a similar process in China in 1956-7, as the final years of the First Five-Year Plan saw the 'usual progression from economic to sociopolitical demands'²⁷⁴ beginning to develop among workers. Although '[w]ith a few rare exceptions, the labour discontent never took an organized form'²⁷⁵, there were some calls for independent trade unions, and given a few more weeks or months before the reimposition of repressive controls, workers' activities in China, which included a great deal of grassroots self-organization by workers, albeit mainly for the pursuit of enterprise-specific disputes, might well have developed in this direction. Certainly the experience of autonomous, collective political action which many workers gained through their involvement in Red Guard groups in the three years of the Cultural Revolution, as well as the effect of this activity on their attitudes to authority, made the formation of independent unions more of a possibility in the event of conflict with enterprise or higher authorities in the late 1970s and 1980s, as we shall see from the third and fourth sections of this study. Although the unrest of 1956-7 cannot really be classed as national in scope, since it involved no nationwide organization by workers or coordination of action, it did occur in virtually every Chinese industrial centre, bringing it close to the sort of nationwide disturbance identified by Mao as a sign of errors in the Party's overall

273 Laura D'Andrea Tyson, 'Aggregate economic difficulties and workers' welfare', in *ibid.*, 130.

274 J M Montias, 'Observations on strikes, riots and other disturbances', in *ibid.*, 173.

275 Gipouloux, *Les Cent Fleurs*, 211.

line, rather than merely its methods or policies. It is clear from his comments in 1957 that, had those involved in the disturbances attempted to organize themselves in the same way as activists in the Workers' Autonomous Federations did in 1989, they would have met with a similar response from the regime: even if errors of line resulted in protests reaching all the way to West Chang'an Avenue in Beijing²⁷⁶, he asserted, 'as long as we build up the army, we will not lose the country'.²⁷⁷ The severity of the repressive measures to which the Chinese leadership was prepared to resort testifies to the seriousness of this second confrontation; during the Cultural Revolution, the third confrontation, it did in fact become necessary to send the army in to restore order in factories, marking a further escalation in the conflict.

276 The road separating Tian'anmen Square from the Forbidden City and the Zhongnanhai leadership compound.

277 Mao Zedong *Sixiang Wansui!*, 87.

SECTION THREE

'TO REBEL IS JUSTIFIED':

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND AFTER

In the autumn and winter of 1957, the policy of combining suppression, persuasion and limited concessions had restored order in enterprises, stifled workers' protests, and stopped in its tracks the trend toward the formation by workers of their own, small-scale independent organizations. In the autumn and winter of 1966, however, workers began forming unprecedentedly large organizations of their own, first illegally and then with the blessing of some top-level leaders, and a wave of protest by workers swept through urban China the force of which threatened to push the Cultural Revolution in entirely unintended directions. To describe what happened in these months as a crisis in workers' relationship with Party-state authorities is something of an understatement, since their actions for a short period constituted an all-out attack on those authorities and an attempt to overthrow them completely. Before we can examine in detail the actions of workers in the Cultural Revolution¹

1 At the time, the Cultural Revolution was generally understood by both those in power and ordinary Chinese people to have come to an end with the Ninth Party Congress of spring 1969. It was only after Mao referred to the movement in the present tense in a 1974 document that officials began to refer to it again as ongoing. The post-Mao Chinese leadership has adopted the ten-year (1966-76) periodization of the Cultural Revolution, as have most current researchers on China, but this is a distortion of actual events. In this study I have found it important to distinguish between the Cultural Revolution proper, the mass movement of 1966-69, and the following seven years of

itself, however, something must be said about what happened in enterprises in the intervening nine years, how old issues developed and new ones emerged, to prime workers for their involvement in this movement.

The issues of the correct way to manage socialist enterprises and the proper relations between workers and cadres were the subject of much official discussion and experimentation, and not a little controversy, during the Great Leap Forward (GLF) of 1958-60 and in the years up to the launching of the Cultural Revolution in May 1966. In fact, the outlines of what came to be known as the 'two-line struggle' in industry can be discerned in the debates of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the 'revisionist' and 'revolutionary' programmes for enterprise management began to coalesce around the Seventy Articles² and the Anshan Constitution³ respectively. In broad terms, the Anshan Constitution (which was closely identified with Mao's line during the Cultural Revolution and even more so after it in the Gang of Four's disputes with Deng Xiaoping) stood for: politics in command in enterprises; stronger Party leadership in management and politics; mass movements and the methods of

political dominance by the Gang of Four and their followers, for reasons which will become apparent. Since there is no generally accepted term for the latter period, I refer to it simply by its dates. For a more detailed exposition of the problems of Cultural Revolution periodization and the competing paradigms of social cleavage during the movement, see Anita Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions about the Red Guard movement: The necessity to re-examine Cultural Revolution factionalism and periodization', *Journal of Contemporary China* 1, 1, Fall 1992, especially 69-70, 73-4.

- 2 The document's official title is 'Regulation of tasks in state-owned industrial enterprises (Draft)', issued by the CCP Central Committee, 15.9.61.
- 3 The Constitution of the Anshan Iron and Steel Corporation in north China; Mao personally endorsed the Anshan Municipal Party Committee Secretary's 'Report concerning technical reform and the technical revolutionary movement on the industrial front' in March 1960.

mass mobilization in enterprises; the continuation of the GLF policies of workers' participation in management, cadres' participation in productive labour, reform of irrational rules and regulations, and the three-in-one combination of workers, technicians and cadres for technical reform⁴; and technical revolution.⁵ If the Anshan Constitution could thus be seen as upholding the GLF emphasis on the mass line in industry and associated policies, then the Seventy Articles were 'essentially aimed at negating the GLF experiments and returning to one-man management'⁶, with their stress on the primacy of the economic role of enterprises and of production (economics in command, as the Cultural Revolution polemics had it); the authority of the factory director and the chief engineer; strict responsibility systems and regulations and tighter labour discipline; material incentives and some reintroduction of piece-rates; and less political study.⁷ Of course, the distinction between these two 'lines' was not as clear-cut in theory or in practice as it might appear from the outline above. Yet neither was the so-called 'two-line struggle' in industrial management a total fiction: real issues lie behind the debate which concerned not only top-level leaders but also workers.

It is now generally agreed that the Cultural Revolution could not have developed into an all-embracing, large-scale mass movement in the way that it did simply as a result of high-level manipulation of various mass organizations by Party leaders engaged in a power struggle. Clearly genuine and powerful social forces were at work, both in bringing Chinese

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- 4 Often known as the 'Two participations and one reform' policy, or the 'two-one-three'.
 - 5 These are the five principles always emphasized in press discussions of the Anshan Constitution; see for example *Guangming Ribao* 21.3.70, in *SCMP* 4327, 78-88.
 - 6 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 129.
 - 7 See the discussion of the Seventy Articles in Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 87-93.

citizens into the movement and in shaping the split, apparent in every section of society, into two different and antagonistic factions; this is as true of workers as it is of other groups such as students.⁸ The demands and criticisms put forward by workers in the last weeks of 1966 did not appear out of thin air, but have their roots in the policies which were implemented, or in some cases not implemented, in enterprises in the years leading up to the launching of the Cultural Revolution.

It will be remembered that workers' protests in 1956-7 centred on three main concerns: inequalities and injustices in wages and welfare, cadre bureaucratism and workstyle, and democratic rights and participation in the workplace; all these issues were of course related. If we take official statements of policy over the years 1958-1966 at face value, we would expect to find improvements with regard to the latter two concerns during the GLF period, with particular emphasis on workers' participation in management, while a more austere approach toward wages and welfare prevailed, with a marked move away from piece-rates and bonuses and stress on self-reliance and mutual aid in welfare provisions. From 1961 this would change, with a much greater emphasis on material incentives and wage differentials, implying material benefits for at least some workers, while measures for improving participation and cadres' workstyle slipped down the agenda. A further shift might be expected from about 1964 as the Socialist Education Movement (SEM) received more attention and aspects of GLF policies, especially those concerning political

8 On the factional alignment of students, see for example Chan, *Children of Mao*, and Rosen, *Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou*; on workers, Walder, 'Zhang Chunqiao and Shanghai's January Revolution', *Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies* 32, 1978, Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers in the Cultural Revolution: the interplay of political and economic issues', in Howe (ed.), *Shanghai: Revolution and development in an Asian metropolis*, and Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution* (ed. Chan).

relations in the workplace, began to come to the forefront again. In fact, this somewhat superficial account of what went on in enterprises in these years is not entirely inaccurate, but if we examine one or two points in detail, we will see how measures which seemed to address some of the major grievances behind the 1956-7 industrial unrest failed to live up to expectations, and in some cases significantly worsened the position of many workers.

Workers during the Great Leap Forward

The participation of workers in management, one aspect of the GLF 'two-one-three' policy, is a case in point. Initially it seemed to offer 'a further expansion of democracy in the management of enterprises ... a new form of direct participation of the workers in management'⁹, by allowing workers at the production-team level to take over certain tasks, such as attendance and production record-keeping, planning, management of tools, quality inspection, and maintenance of equipment.¹⁰ This new form of direct participation was not intended to replace the representative system of workers' congresses, which was to continue alongside it, but was seen as putting management 'on an even broader mass basis'¹¹, further strengthening mass supervision and participation. Clearly, this policy of more direct participation in management should have been a major step forward in meeting workers' demands for more influence in the workplace, yet there are a number of reasons why it proved a disappointment in practice.

One limitation was inherent in the system: participation

9 Renmin Ribao 26.4.58, in SCMP 1774, 8.

10 Chung Chong-wook, *Maoism and development: the politics of industrial management in China*, 147.

11 Renmin Ribao 26.4.58, in SCMP 1774, 8.

was limited to the level of the production team. This aspect of the policy drew particularly harsh criticism from Soviet observers of China, who, noting that 'participation was very modest and occurred only at the lowest level with little possibility of influencing the enterprise plan'¹², condemned the Party's rhetoric on the subject as '"social demagoguery that was directed at the creation of illusions in the working class".'¹³ But even at the team level, not all workers had an opportunity to participate: figures for 1960, according to Wang Hefeng of the Heilongjiang Provincial CCP Committee, the main promoter of the policy, showed that 30-50% of workers were involved¹⁴, and this percentage 'seemed to have been even less in 1958 and 1959.'¹⁵ It seems likely that this figure includes relatively high levels of participation in a small number of 'model' enterprises where the policy was first tried out and experiments went furthest, but fairly low levels elsewhere.

Workers' participation in management does seem to have been the most problematic component of the 'two-one-three' policy, not least because of the 'active and passive resistance of cadres'¹⁶ which Stephen Andors finds to have been the 'major obstacle'¹⁷ to its implementation. As we saw earlier with the WRC, even where structures for representation and participation exist, cadre attitudes can render such structures virtually useless to workers, and this seems to have been the case with GLF participation in management, where some workers' own lack of enthusiasm for the policy can be traced to the intimidatory effect of cadres' known opposition

12 Rozman, *A mirror for socialism*, 120.

13 Quoted in *ibid.*, 120.

14 *Hongqi* 15, 1960, 9.

15 Chung, *Maoism and development*, 147, note 53.

16 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 73.

17 *Ibid.*, 77.

to it.¹⁸ As the retreat from the GLF gathered pace from 1961, variations in the degree and importance of workers' participation continued to exist, but in general this aspect of the 'two-one-three' policy declined more than either cadre participation in labour or the three-in-one technical groups.¹⁹ There is evidence of greater persistence with workers' participation in heavy industry, while light industrial management remained 'closely related to pre-1949 methods' with cadres 'less likely to accept the GLF revolutionary concepts of human relationships'²⁰ such as the equality of workers, technicians and cadres. Given this tendency, it is unlikely that what appeared to be a concerted effort for improved participation by workers in management made much headway in, for example, the textile and other light industries in Guangzhou. Moreover the city's distance, in terms of policy as well as geography, from the heavily industrialized northeast where the policy was pioneered also militates against its having had a significant impact in the southern city beyond the first thrust of the GLF in 1958.

Another factor undermining workers' ability to take advantage of the 'two participations' policy, or to make use of the workers' congress, a form which continued to exist throughout these years, was the lack of powerful union support. Again, this is something we noted as an obstacle to meaningful participation by workers in the early post-liberation period and in 1956-7. Union organizations had been purged in the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 and again in 1958, a year which saw a debate on whether there was any point in the unions' continuing to exist²¹, and so were in as weak a position as they had ever been and very unlikely to be able

18 Ibid., 77.

19 See the discussion in *ibid.*, 105-120.

20 Ibid., 121.

21 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 3.2.58, 1.

to support workers in exercising increased influence at any level in the enterprise. The weakness of the unions may also have contributed to other problems for workers during the GLF, such as the rescinding of many of the concessions on welfare and livelihood which had been won in the strikes of 1957. Demands made during that period were now invariably characterized as 'excessive'²², and the press strove to create the impression that workers themselves were in the forefront of the return to 'plain living'²³, voluntarily giving up over-generous welfare benefits. In the case of piece-rate wages, the argument that workers themselves had decided on abolition is more plausible, as this form of pay had always proved divisive and was at the root of some of the bitterest disputes over wage reform in 1956-7; it is quite possible, therefore, that many workers supported the move away from piece-rates even if they did not initiate it. However, the claim that large numbers of workers were also volunteering to give up overtime pay and bonuses for the sake of 'building socialism with more, better, faster and more economical results'²⁴ should be treated with greater scepticism, not least because excessive overtime was a serious problem in many enterprises during the GLF. Additionally, as we saw in the previous section, the ingenious schemes devised in some of Guangzhou's enterprises to avoid giving workers the overtime pay to which they were legally entitled were themselves the target of fierce criticism in 1956-7; it seems unlikely that workers' attitudes towards compulsory, excessive and unpaid overtime had undergone such a complete transformation in barely two years.

One of the bleakest assessments of workers' experiences during the GLF which this author has come across is that of the Soviet sinologist A P Davydov, who finds that during these

22 Ibid., *Gongren Ribao* 7.7.58, in *SCMP* 1817, 2.

23 Ibid., 2.

24 See for example *Jiefang Ribao* 19.10.58, in *SCMP* 1947, 16.

years, workers

were made to labour almost without rest. Exhausted by that gruelling experience, they then experienced the years of hunger and, for many, relocation to villages. The Great Leap Forward was characterized by reduced worker participation in management, wages that provided little incentive to diligent work, unconcern about well-being of workers ...the rate of accidents sharply increased.²⁵

These comments may appear exaggerated, but in fact evidence can be found to support them with regard to the three main points: participation, safety, and overtime. We have already seen that both workers' direct participation in management and their supervision of cadres through the workers' congress were undermined by cadres' lack of commitment, or even hostility, to these institutions, as well as by the weakness of the unions, purged and now under very tight Party control.

Fears that safety was being sacrificed in the pursuit of ever higher production quotas surfaced very early in the GLF²⁶, and reappeared frequently thereafter. However, the regular appeals to cadres to view safety measures as a help, not a hindrance, to increased production seem to have had little effect, apparently unable to compete with the enormous pressure on all enterprises to meet impossibly high targets by whatever means necessary. The extent of the safety problem in these years is well illustrated by a *Gongren Ribao* editorial promoting safety in production, which nonetheless also includes praise for the 'advanced experience' of a certain enterprise in carrying out cleaning and maintenance of

25 Quoted in Rozman, *A mirror for socialism*, 117. Lay-offs and rustication of industrial workers will be discussed below.

26 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 26.3.58, 1.

machines without stopping them²⁷, a prospect which will horrify anyone who has ever operated machinery. As for excessive overtime, the problem of overwork was quite frankly acknowledged in the press in 1960, although the phenomenon was attributed, not very plausibly, to workers' own excessive enthusiasm for production.²⁸ As late as 1965, editorials on combining labour and rest in correct proportions were still appearing, indicating a very persistent problem.²⁹ We should keep this aspect of the situation in enterprises in mind when we evaluate the extent and significance of workers' participation in management during the GLF. Since participation in certain production-team management tasks was to be done in workers' spare time, on top of the usual eight hours of production work, overwork and poor safety standards must have undermined workers' enthusiasm and ability with regard to these extra tasks.

Finally, it should be noted that many of the problems of overwork and neglect of safety during this period are directly attributable to the 'one reform' component of the 'two-one-three' policy, i.e. the reform of irrational regulations and systems in enterprises. Intended to promote the revision of 'those regulations and systems that restrict the activism of the masses and the development of their productivity'³⁰, this policy sometimes seems to have resulted in measures essential to safety at work being abolished as 'irrational', without any adequate replacement first being developed by 'the masses'.³¹ This is a clear example of a measure intended to benefit workers, not least by facilitating their participation in

27 Gongren Ribao 9.6.59, in SCMP 2041, 17.

28 Gongren Ribao 26.7.60, in Current Background 640, 23.

29 For example Renmin Ribao 21.6.65, 1.

30 Renmin Ribao 26.4.58, in SCMP 1774, 4.

31 See for example Gongren Ribao 9.6.59, in SCMP 2041, 15-17; Gongren Ribao 19.7.59, in SCMP 2080, 11-15.

management and breaking down some of the unnecessarily rigid regulations by which cadres exercised control in the enterprise, actually having a very negative impact on vital aspects of workers' conditions of work.

It is important to remember that although policies in industrial enterprises from 1961 onwards represented a general retreat from the 'mass line' of the GLF, the latter was by no means completely discredited or repudiated, but on the contrary, still had its powerful partisans, notably Mao. With his endorsement of the Anshan Constitution in 1960, 'the issue of the mass line in industrial management continued to become politicized'³². It should also be noted that although the results of the GLF were often inimical in the extreme to workers' interests, this was almost entirely due to the continual upward revision of production targets already at unrealistically high levels, and the consequent pressure to increase production at all costs. The stated aims of GLF policies in industry, however, did not necessarily run contrary to workers' interests and aspirations: workers did want to participate more in management; they did want cadres to lose their arrogant disdain for workers and reform their bureaucratist work-style by coming out of their offices and participating in productive labour; and they did want their suggestions for innovation and reform taken seriously and, if feasible, implemented promptly, rather than being shunted off into some labyrinthine process of upward referral and endless discussion. So support for GLF policies both at the highest and lowest level did exist, and to a certain extent continued in the 1961-66 period.

It is true that as the GLF developed, '[r]evolutionary rhetoric not backed by worker participation in management and cadre participation in labour could lead to cynicism'³³, which

32 Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 67.

33 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 150.

in turn might precipitate a shift away from these sorts of political incentives and back to material incentives. But this is evidence of the tendency we noted earlier, whereby the discrepancy between the official rhetoric about workers' position as the masters of the enterprise and their actual experience in the workplace created disillusionment and discontent; it shows not that workers rejected political incentives such as increased participation and more control over their own work, but that the failure of these incentives to materialize (mainly because of cadre opposition) led to dissatisfaction which could only undermine production, necessitating greater reliance on other forms of incentives which could actually be implemented.

1961-65: Enterprises under the Seventy Articles

Although as we have seen workers' interests generally suffered as a result of the actual impact of GLF policies, this does not necessarily mean that workers were in favour of the policies, based on the Seventy Articles, which despite some high-level opposition began to replace them from 1961. In fact, given that these policies in many ways represented a return to one-man management³⁴, with a strengthening of the authority of the factory director, the chief engineer³⁵ and administrative and technical staff in general, a certain amount of resentment among workers would be expected: one-man management and the cadre attitudes which tended to accompany it were, after all, one of the major causes of the discontent and protests which built up during 1956-7.

Policies based on the Seventy Articles were 'intensively implemented'³⁶ between 1961 and 1966, and any adjustments made

34 Ibid., 129.

35 Lee, *Industrial management*, 89.

36 Ibid., 91.

seem to have resulted from pressure from Mao.

For instance, a fresh effort was made to institutionalize the cadres' participation in manual labour ... an attempt was made to accommodate workers' participation in managerial functions through an institutionalized, rather than a mobilizational, channel (the congress of the representatives of workers and staff).³⁷

But the revision of the Seventy Articles suggested by Mao in September 1962 at the 10th Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress was not carried out until 1965, and few changes were actually made even then.³⁸ Some sensitivity to workers' likely opposition can be detected in early articles on the new direction in enterprise management, where it was often stressed that management systems were not intended to control workers, but reflected their own practical experience.³⁹ A distinction was made between the operation of, for example, responsibility systems in socialist enterprises, which were said to reflect 'the comradely and mutually cooperative relations between the workers', and systems such as Taylorism, which Lenin 'most appropriately called ... the "blood and sweat system of science."'⁴⁰ The often heated debate on what constituted rational and necessary regulations and what rules and systems designed for 'control, check and suppression'⁴¹ of workers is one to which we will return, with particular

37 Ibid., 88.

38 Ibid., 92.

39 See for example *Jiefang Ribao* 5.6.61, in *SCMM* 312, 16-20.

40 'On the responsibility system...', *Jingji Yanjiu* 7, 3.8.62, in *SCMM* 333, 30.

41 This is the phrase (guan, ka, ya) commonly used by supporters of the Gang of Four in their polemics against Deng Xiaoping's policies for industry, especially in 1975-6.

reference to the 1970-76 period and the influence of the Gang of Four in industry, but these concerns were clearly already present in the aftermath of the GLF.

If we examine the extent to which concessions on the 'two participations' made policies based on the Seventy Articles more acceptable to workers, we soon find that their impact was rather limited. Cadre participation in labour had been stressed since the spring of 1957 as a valuable method for tackling bureaucratism, bringing cadres closer to the rank and file workforce and preventing their political degeneration. Initially introduced in response to workers' criticisms, this measure continued to be stressed throughout the GLF and right up until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.⁴² However, its success in reforming the arrogant and high-handed attitudes which did so much to fuel workers' protests in 1956-7 appears questionable. Given the attacks on cadres' bureaucratism and lack of concern for workers, strongly reminiscent of those made in 1956-7, which accompanied the nationwide wave of 'counterrevolutionary economism' among workers in December 1966 and January 1967⁴³, it seems unlikely that participation in labour brought about any major or lasting change in cadres' attitudes. Andors has noted that '[b]y itself, participation did not lead to better and more egalitarian relationships between workers and managers. Cadres had to change subtle aspects of their behaviour ...'⁴⁴.

Where cadres did go down to the shop floor, this did not always have the desired effect of dispelling workers' hostility toward their leaders. Many cadres lacked the necessary skills to participate in productive labour, and so

42 See 'The participation of cadres in manual labour', *Hongqi* 6, in *ECMM* 163, 11-13.

43 See Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 46.

44 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 72.

might end up hanging around on the factory floor leaning on their brooms for much of the time⁴⁵, in which situation, far from appreciating cadres' presence among them, workers generally suspected them of using 'participation' as an opportunity to supervise workers more closely⁴⁶, or even to spy on them. There were also reports indicating widespread reluctance among cadres to participate in labour, with one early article finding that they had to be 'driven' to participate⁴⁷; 'nominal' participation, avoiding any dirty or strenuous work, was also noted.⁴⁸ But in part, cadres' reluctance stemmed from a genuine conviction that regular participation in manual labour was not compatible with the efficient performance of their other duties. This was acknowledged as a real problem from about the middle of 1963, as cadres' participation in labour was re-emphasized as part of the SEM. The search for improved practical methods of participation was, however, accompanied by a strong emphasis on the political importance and benefits of participation.⁴⁹

Yet articles on improved systems for participation from this time still identify cadre resistance as a significant problem, and their portrayal of the majority of enterprise cadres indicates that little progress had been made since 1957 in improving work-styles and overcoming bureaucratism, as can be seen from this description of cadres at the Guangzhou Chemical Works:

[S]ome leadership cadres were seriously affected by bourgeois individualism, ... for a long time they

45 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 22.9.64, in *SCMP* 3325, 11.

46 See Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 73.

47 *Renmin Ribao* 27.11.58, in *SCMP* 1914, 3.

48 *Nanfang Ribao* 22.9.64, in *SCMP* 3313, 11.

49 See for example *Hongqi* 13-14, 10.7.63, in *SCMM* 376, 1-13; *Nanfang Ribao* 22.9.64, in *SCMP* 3325, 10-16; *Renmin Ribao* 22.9.64, in *SCMP* 3313, 16-19.

estranged themselves from the masses and from reality, and ... made rather grave errors of bureaucratism and commandism ... Among the leadership cadres, some indulged in an extravagant life and demanded privileges. Some individual cadres even succumbed to bribery and thievery and became degenerate.⁵⁰

And despite the renewed emphasis from mid-1963 on the necessity of cadre participation in labour as 'an effective guarantee against corruption by bourgeois thinking'⁵¹, in 1965 we find that

Massive and overlapping administration, detailed and anomalous scholasticist regulations, complicated administrative procedures, and the pompous airs of administrative personnel which separate them from production and alienate them from the masses continue to be the common defects of many industrial enterprises.⁵²

Evidently the 'revolution in enterprise management'⁵³, which this article identifies as having begun a year earlier, had yet to make much progress in breaking down the 'invisible barrier'⁵⁴ between workers and cadres which had caused so much resentment and hostility over the past ten years.

What of the workers' congress in this period? Renewed efforts to promote this form of workplace democracy are evident from the end of 1961, but the emphasis is always on

50 Nanfang Ribao 22.9.64, in SCMP 3325, 10.

51 Renmin Ribao, 22.9.64, in SCMP 3313, 16.

52 Renmin Ribao 24.9.65, in SCMP 3555, 3 (emphasis added).

53 Ibid., 3.

54 Nanfang Ribao 22.9.64, in SCMP 3325, 12.

the role of the congress in solving production problems and increasing productivity.⁵⁵ This tells us a number of things: firstly, that the workers' congress was being revived after the GLF largely because more direct (although low-level) forms of participation were no longer in favour; secondly, that workers' role in the enterprise was now for the most part restricted to matters directly connected to production; and thirdly, that cadre resistance to the implementation of the congress system necessitated a strong emphasis on its beneficial, not harmful, effect on production. But in spite of signs of revival of the workers' congress in 1961, as was mentioned above, this and other concessions to workers unhappy with the influence of the Seventy Articles in industry made little headway until 1965.

In that year it was announced that in some enterprises the system of workers' congresses had been 'overhauled and improved'⁵⁶ as part of the SEM, to remedy defects such as the use of congress meetings simply to give instructions and concomitant neglect of workers' opinions, and the practice whereby 'the workers representatives were nominated by the leadership. Most of them were cadres.'⁵⁷ Monthly 'democratic life meetings' organized by the enterprise trade union committee also began to be promoted toward the end of 1965 as a forum where workers could speak out freely, report on conditions at the shop-floor level and participate in democratic problem-solving.⁵⁸ But there is nothing in any of the 1965 accounts of how the system was to be improved which would lead one to expect a significant increase in meaningful participation by workers in the running of their enterprises

55 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 11.11.61, 1; *Hongqi* 2, 16.1.62, in *SCMM* 300, 20-23.

56 *Gongren Ribao* 13.10.65, in *SCMP* 3576, 11.

57 *Ibid.*, 11.

58 See *ibid.*, 11-12; *Gongren Ribao* 9.10.65, in *SCMP* 3569, 12-16.

by means of the workers' congress. So we see that neither of the 'two participations' was able to make significant progress while the Seventy Articles were in force in industry, in spite of renewed political pressure for their implementation as the SEM gathered momentum, and in contravention of workers' own preferences.

To summarize workers' experiences between 1958 and 1966, we have seen that only some of the issues at the heart of workers' protests in 1956-7 were addressed by GLF policies in industry, and even here progress was limited and temporary; at the same time, other aspects of the GLF line significantly worsened working conditions and put many workers at risk in the enterprise. Materially, workers did not fare well as material incentives were done away with and overtime was often unpaid; politically their position suffered too, as they could expect no support from the purged and weakened unions, and cadres were thus largely able to resist pressure from workers for an enlarged role in management and to continue to disregard the decisions of the workers' congress. Cadres' participation in labour also made only limited progress, and appeared to have little effect on those attitudes to which workers had most objected in 1956-7. The increased authority of enterprise leadership cadres after the implementation of the Seventy Articles, which has been described as tantamount to a return to one-man management, can only have worsened this situation. In all, we are led to conclude that workers' main grievances after the transformation of industry in 1956 must have remained to a large extent intact throughout the GLF and in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution, and in some cases may have intensified.

Workers' grievances on the eve of the Cultural Revolution: the emergence of new issues

As we saw in earlier sections, the issues of workplace

democracy and participation discussed above had long been a bone of contention in enterprises, with enterprise-level cadres and the Party as a whole unwilling to allow workers the degree of control over their enterprise which they desired. But during the GLF and in the years up to 1966, two more issues emerged which were to become increasingly important during the Cultural Revolution and in the early 1970s. These two issues, the system of temporary or contract labour, and the problem of enterprise systems and regulations formulated by cadres to control or 'rule over' workers, reflect both the way in which many workers found their economic position and political rights undermined by changes in the employment system prior to the Cultural Revolution, and the growing tendency to see the relations between cadres and workers in an enterprise as those between a minority who had power and a majority who did not, or between 'rulers' and 'ruled'. While the contract labour system was a major cause of the upsurge of workers' protest from the end of 1966, the debate over regulations and authority in the enterprise shows how the deep-rooted antagonism between workers and cadres which we identified as the distinguishing feature of the 1956-7 protests had not only not been alleviated by GLF measures designed for that purpose, but had if anything worsened over the years.

We have already seen how during the GLF the movement to reform irrational regulations and systems led to the removal of vital safety measures as well as genuinely superfluous rules, and thus contributed to the high rate of industrial accidents in these years. But it must be remembered that, along with the 'two participations', this 'one reform' policy was in part intended to correct the impression, which had been gaining ground among many workers in 1956-7, that cadres in their enterprises and above constituted a separate, privileged group which had great power over workers' lives, including the power to make the rules in enterprises. Giving workers a stronger role in reforming regulations would be one concrete

way in which their theoretical status as the masters of the enterprise could actually begin to become a reality. It is in this context that the criticism, from 1964 onwards, of excessive regulations in enterprises designed specifically to control workers should be understood:

In some cases, leading cadres of a number of enterprises have even set up sections and sub-units as well as other administrative organs for the purpose of controlling workers. They have laid down regulations and instituted systems for the express purpose of bringing workers into line ... It is wrong for the leadership and administrative personnel of enterprises to stress 'control' and their authority, to make every decision, and to act in accordance with the dead letter of the regulations instead of trusting and relying on the working masses.⁵⁹

While some backtracking on GLF reforms for the sake of safety was undoubtedly necessary, it is clear that the Seventy Articles, with their emphasis on the authority of administrative and technical cadres, gave free rein to those enterprise officials who preferred a very clear division of labour whereby they gave instructions and the workers followed them. Workers' position in the enterprise was summed up in the saying: 'the leadership makes the laws, the managers enforce the laws, and the workers obey the laws.'⁶⁰ It is important to bear in mind that this issue of excessive regulation and control of workers was not just a convenient stick with which the Gang of Four and their supporters could beat Deng Xiaoping and his in their 1970s polemics, but that

59 Renmin Ribao 24.9.65, in SCMP 11.10.65, 4.

60 See Gong Xiaowen, 'The two-line struggle in enterprise management', Hongqi 3, 1976, 67. The phrase appears in many other articles around this time.

workers' resentment at petty regulations governing even the time they were allowed to spend in the toilet⁶¹ was real, and was building up in the years immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution while the Seventy Articles held sway in industry.

The deep-rooted feeling was that the workers were excluded from meaningful participation in making decisions about production and industrial operations that constituted an intimate part of their lives... the workers operated machinery, used equipment and manufactured products, yet they were not permitted to have any say about their work environment. Instead, 'experts' controlled every move of the workers and every step of the operation or process. While excluding workers from participation in management, the experts did not necessarily do a better job.⁶²

Resentment of strict discipline, and a combative attitude among workers toward those who tried to enforce it, crop up repeatedly in reports on conflict in industrial enterprises even at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1969⁶³, and continued indiscipline and 'anarchy' in enterprises, blamed on the influence of the Cultural Revolution, was a frequent complaint in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Even now,

61 See Lee, 'The Gang of Four: Radical politics and modernization in China', in S S K Chin (ed.) *The Gang of Four: First essays after the fall*, 90-1. This hardy perennial among workers' complaints about excessive discipline has recently reappeared among workers in foreign-owned enterprises in Shenzhen - see the translation attached to Anita Chan's 'PRC workers under "capitalism with Chinese characteristics"', *China Information* 5, 4 (Spring 1991).

62 Lee, 'The Gang of Four', 91.

63 See for example *China News Analysis* 769, 15.8.69, 'Workers and discipline' (whole issue, 1-7).

resentment among workers of strict control and regulation in the workplace, enforced by means of wage deductions, seems to exist in some of China's best-known state enterprises, despite the high wages and benefits which accompany it.⁶⁴ Thus the potential of issues of regulation and discipline to arouse strong feelings among workers should not be underestimated.

The same articles which throughout the first half of the 1960s stress the necessity of regulations and 'control' in industrial enterprises also struggle to distinguish between the nature of these regulations in socialist and in capitalist enterprises, and to draw a distinction between the exploitative nature of capitalist managers and the fundamental political equality between workers and management cadres in socialist enterprises.⁶⁵ This subtext to the debate, the question as to whether cadres (especially those who fail to participate in manual labour) are merely carrying out their allotted tasks in the division of labour, or are actually using their position to exploit the workers, is one which becomes increasingly important in the years 1958-66. The possibility that those with power who did not take part directly in labour might begin to constitute a new, privileged stratum or class was raised as early as 1957⁶⁶, and the idea that the exercise of administrative power in isolation from workers might lead cadres to degenerate into a new bourgeoisie has already been identified as one of the main concerns behind the revival of cadre participation in labour from 1964. The concept of officials as a new class reached its apogee in the

64 See for example 'Model on the rocks', on the Shougang [Capital Iron and Steel] group, *Far Eastern Economic Review* 156, 46, 63-4. (18.11.93)

65 See Xuexi 24, 18.12.57, in *ECMM* 123, 20; *Jiefang* 7, 5.6.61, in *SCMM* 312, 16-20; *Hongqi* 1, 1.1.62, in *SCMM* 298, 25-30; *Jingji Yanjiu* 7, 3.8.62, in *SCMM* 333, 29-41; *Hongqi* 13-14, 10.7.63, in *SCMM* 376, 1-13; *Guangming Ribao* 15.3.65, in *CB* 765, 18-19, and other articles in this issue of *CB*.

66 Xuexi 24, 18.12.57, in *ECMM* 123, 20.

Cultural Revolution itself with the publication of the Hunanese group Shengwulian's 'Whither China?' and its attack on the 'red capitalist' class in China⁶⁷, but developments in enterprises in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution undoubtedly laid the foundation on which this sort of view could develop, as retreats from even the limited GLF gains in participation and influence in the workplace made workers feel still less like the 'masters of the enterprise' they were claimed to be.

Finally, something must be said about the worker-peasant system of employment prior to the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁸ During the GLF, it had already become apparent that some groups of workers, namely new recruits to the rapidly expanding workforce and temporary or contract workers, were not enjoying the same rights and benefits in terms of job security, pay and conditions, and in some cases union membership, as were longer-established and more skilled and experienced workers. New recruits during the GLF, according to one Soviet observer,

67 'Whither China?' is translated in *SCMP* 4190, 1-18, and elsewhere. The original is reprinted in *Minzhu Zhonghua* (Democratic China), published by Zhongwen Daxue Xueshehui (CUHK Student Union), 1982, 31-50.

68 Strictly speaking, there is a distinction between urban contract or temporary labour and contract or seasonal labour in industry in rural localities or in agriculture-related industry, as is pointed out in Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 298, note 68. In this study we will be referring mainly to the use of temporary and contract labour in urban industry; this pre-dates the use of the term 'worker-peasant system', but seems to have become a major cause of conflict only from 1964, when the 'worker-peasant system' began to be promoted. There is clearly a connection between the two forms of employment, hence the use of the terms 'worker-peasant' system and contract labour system interchangeably by many writers. For an account of the development of contract labour in China, particularly the controversial developments from 1964, see the translations from unofficial Cultural Revolution publications in *SCMM* 616, 21-30.

were paid badly and had little chance of advancement as they acquired new work skills and experience. They received little in the way of social benefits. These workers were not only underpaid, they were without rights.⁶⁹

As the GLF ground to a halt in 1960 amid confusion, shortages, and even famine, lay-offs in industry meant that 'the contract workers were the first sent back to their villages'⁷⁰, and young workers from 'bad' class backgrounds in some cases also lost their jobs 'even if they had been admitted to unions'⁷¹.

From about 1962, and especially after 1964⁷², this system of reducing costs by restricting the number of workers in secure, higher-paid, unionized posts, and making up the shortfall with lower-paid contract or temporary workers with fewer or no rights in the enterprise, was consolidated and expanded, and became generally known as the worker-peasant system. Although there was a political rationale to the scheme, namely the gradual diminution of two of the 'three great differences' which had to be overcome during the transition to communism, those between urban and rural areas and between workers and peasants⁷³, it is likely that the system appealed to enterprise management mainly because of the savings on welfare spending which it offered. Contract workers did not have the right to bring their dependents to the city with them, reducing pressure on housing, nurseries etc., and could be sent back to their homes or communes when

69 Quoted in Rozman, *A mirror for socialism*, 117.

70 White, *Policies of chaos*, 159.

71 Ibid., 160.

72 See Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao and Shanghai's January Revolution', 40.

73 The other is the difference between mental and manual labour; the 'two participations' were intended to tackle this.

not needed, where other units would be responsible for their welfare. There were also clear advantages to the system where cadres might otherwise have faced protests from workers, as any temporary or contract workers who showed signs of causing this sort of trouble could swiftly be got rid of.⁷⁴

In fact, welfare for the better-established, unionized workers was actually expanded during 1962-5 as material incentives and welfare in general came back into favour, 'but cost-conscious managers tried to limit the groups receiving such benefits.'⁷⁵ Many temporary and contract workers, who had been employed in large numbers as the workforce expanded during the GLF, had over the years come to be doing the same work as permanent workers in the same enterprise, and so in July 1963 the State Council promulgated the 'Notice on the question of shifting temporary workers doing regular work to the permanent establishment'. This Notice allowed enterprises to employ these workers as permanent workers on the usual terms and wages, provided this did not violate the State's labour plans for enterprises in 1963. But this clearly ran contrary to the desire to restrict the number of workers enjoying permanent status and the 'iron rice-bowl' benefits which went with it, and so from mid-1964, as the employment of fewer permanent workers and more on temporary contracts began to be promoted for all enterprises, the transfer of temporary or contract workers to permanent status was discouraged, until in March 1965 the 1963 'Notice' was declared null and void.⁷⁶ Dissatisfaction with and resistance to the contract labour system seem largely to date from this point, as workers who believed they had a good case for transfer to permanent employment, and who thought, in 1963, that this case had been conceded by the authorities, were now refused permanent

74 White, *Policies of chaos*, 189.

75 Ibid., 184-5.

76 See 'Information about Liu Shaoqi in the system of temporary labour and contract labour', in SCMM 616, 22-24.

status; some provincial Labour Department officials reportedly warned the Labour Ministry that this decision would be hard for workers to accept.⁷⁷

The Seventy Articles emphasis on material incentives had already begun to create divisions in the workplace, just as similar policies had in 1956-7:

the rewards to workers who produced more encouraged an elitism that separated officials and technicians from the masses. This separation undermined the doctrine of 'politics in command' and the enthusiasm of the ordinary worker...⁷⁸

With the development of the worker-peasant system, the division became more pronounced between much of the rank and file workforce on one side, and on the other another group, sometimes a majority but in some, especially smaller, enterprises not, of well-established and relatively privileged, more skilled workers, together with cadres, technicians and activists. The worker-peasant programme 'lowered costs for managers; and it raised the relative status of well-established union members. But it repressed most others.'⁷⁹ We will see this sort of division most clearly in the Cultural Revolution itself, as the above two categories largely coincide with the two factions which emerged during the movement.⁸⁰ The roots of the division can also be seen

77 Ibid., 24.

78 Vogel, *Canton under communism*, 319.

79 White, *Policies of chaos*, 182 (emphasis added).

80 Conservative faction workers are often assumed to have been in a majority in large enterprises, and therefore overall, but this view does not take into account the pressures on some workers in these enterprises to become 'nominal' Conservatives despite their own preference for the Rebel faction (Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 43, 75-6, 95). This point will be discussed more fully in the next section.

in the 1956-7 protests, where the most active protestors were often younger workers, especially apprentices, or workers from smaller, joint enterprises who enjoyed fewer benefits and lower pay than workers in large state enterprises.

If the worker-peasant system, by undermining the security of all workers to a certain extent, contributed to the actions of those workers who joined the Conservative faction in the Cultural Revolution in order to preserve their relatively privileged position, this is nothing to the impact it had in motivating others to flock to the Rebel faction to demand that what they saw as an unjust and unacceptably discriminatory system be abolished. The main importance of the worker-peasant system thus lies in its role in fuelling the outbreak of 'counterrevolutionary economism' in which workers first made their mark in large numbers in the Cultural Revolution, and in motivating the subsequent activity in the movement of many of the workers affected, who were often noted to be the most militant. Grievances related to the loss of rights and worsening living standards which were associated with the worker-peasant system (and which prompted one Soviet commentator to brand it 'a form of forced labour'⁸¹) were thus added to discontent over strict discipline in enterprises, and to the long-established list of complaints - lack of opportunities to participate in management, cadres' bureaucratist and arrogant attitudes, higher pay rises and other privileges for technicians and administrative cadres - which are already familiar to us from the protests of 1956-7, laying the foundations for another and a more serious outbreak of workers' protest.

The 'two-line struggle' in industry

When policies related to the Seventy Articles and the

81 Rozman, *A mirror for socialism*, 120.

worker-peasant system are criticized by the Maoists in the Cultural Revolution (and by the Gang of Four and their followers after it), they are invariably referred to as part of Liu Shaoqi's so-called 'bourgeois reactionary line' in industry, with Deng Xiaoping identified as the other major representative of this tendency. However, contradictions soon begin to creep in. As the Cultural Revolution develops, we find Liu Shaoqi being accused simultaneously of promoting the authority of 'bourgeois experts' in the enterprise and supporting their strict control over workers, and of encouraging the tendency of some rank and file workers to overthrow all cadres without discrimination, rather than just targeting a handful of 'capitalist roaders in authority'. The point here is that loyalty to Mao and to the Chairman's 'revolutionary line' were the *sine qua non* of Cultural Revolution activity, and conversely any tendency which a participant in the movement opposed had to be identified with Liu Shaoqi, the 'number one person in authority taking the capitalist road', whatever inconsistency this might demand. When some individuals did begin to have doubts about Mao himself as the Cultural Revolution progressed, they generally kept them to themselves; some activists, such as Yang Xiguang of Shengwulian, the author of 'Whither China?', tied themselves in ideological knots trying to find confirmation of their own views in Mao's writings.⁸²

Since there is no need for us to follow the sort of convoluted reasoning necessary to blame Liu Shaoqi for absolutely everything with which workers were dissatisfied prior to the Cultural Revolution, we can instead look at why Mao's SEM and allied policies failed to benefit the majority of workers in the years 1964-66, and how aspects of this other 'line' also motivated workers to take action during the Cultural Revolution. One reason why the SEM brought few

82 See Unger, 'Whither China? Yang Xiguang, red capitalists, and the social turmoil of the Cultural Revolution', *Modern China* 17, 1, January 1991, 3-37.

improvements in the position of most workers is of course that this political campaign had little impact on the economic structure of enterprises, which in fact was still largely determined by the Seventy Articles. Thus the SEM was 'an attempt ... to sing the superiority of work and the worker when the social structure militated against it.'⁸³ The main beneficiaries of the SEM's renewed emphasis on 'proletarianism'⁸⁴ were actually those who could claim to be the vanguard of the working class: 'local leaders of Party branches and activists in Socialist Education struggles. Many workers received no new benefits at all.'⁸⁵ The promotion of 'politics in command', particularly Mao's thought, could also be used to give unpopular programmes such as the worker-peasant system unimpeachable ideological authority, and did in fact make the system difficult to criticize in 1966-7; high-level public support for protesting contract workers from members of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (CCRG), especially Jiang Qing, seems to have been short-lived.⁸⁶

The other main development in enterprises in the early to mid-sixties which is closely identified with Mao's policy preferences is the establishment of political departments, usually staffed by ex-PLA personnel, to promote the idea of 'politics in command' in all areas of an enterprise's work, and also to control the confidential files compiled on all individuals for which more information had been gathered in urban areas during the SEM⁸⁷. 'Learning from the PLA' had

83 Vogel, *Canton under communism*, 319.

84 White, *Policies of chaos*, 199.

85 Ibid., 218.

86 See Current Scene 6, 5, 15.3.68, 'Sources of labour discontent in China - the worker-peasant system', 9-12.

87 White, *Policies of chaos*, 197. It is safe to assume that when the Renmin Ribao (24.9.65) called for the revolutionization of enterprise management and condemned the establishment of systems specifically to control workers, the criticism was aimed at the old leadership in

been a common slogan since the campaign to emulate Lei Feng began in 1962, but intensive efforts to apply it to industrial enterprises can be observed from 1964. The official unions seem to have resisted it, bringing up many practical difficulties in mechanically applying the military style of work to enterprises⁸⁸, and it is very noticeable that exhortations to learn from the PLA are almost entirely absent from the pages of *Gongren Ribao* during 1965, in sharp contrast to most other newspapers. Mao, however, is on virtually every page, so the objection seems to have been specifically to military, rather than political, influence in industry.

If union cadres were displeased with the growing influence of the political departments, so too were many workers, as was shown once the Cultural Revolution started, when in at least some places cadres staffing political departments became workers' preferred target of attack:

The spearhead of the workers' rebellion had at first been directed against some of the Party authorities at their work units ... At the time of the Cultural Revolution, China's grassroots work units contained two kinds of cadre. One kind consisted of the people who had actually been managing the work units before 1964; the other ... were those demobilized army men in the political departments. When the Cultural Revolution broke out, the workteams sent by Liu Shaoqi often employed members of this second group to criticize members of the first, pre-1964

enterprises and not these political departments, however apt it might have been to them.

88 See *Gongren Ribao* 28.3.65, in *SCMP* 3436, 18-22; 7.4.65, in *SCMP* 3454, 17-21; 19.9.65, in *SCMP* 3552, 19-21. It is striking that those who insist that the PLA's style is easily applicable, and must be applied, to union work, are invariably political department or militia cadres not directly involved in union work, while those who point out the difficulties are all union cadres, usually basic-level.

group as revisionist. But when the workers spontaneously rebelled they seldom directed their attacks against the management cadres, but rather against the much-hated cadres in the political departments.⁸⁹

An added incentive for attacking the political departments was that during the summer of 1966, when it was still not at all clear to the majority of people what sort of campaign the Cultural Revolution was going to be and many treated it as another anti-rightist campaign, still more 'black material' had been collected, in industrial enterprises as well as schools, on the usual suspects (those from 'bad' class backgrounds, those criticized in previous campaigns or who had made political errors or crossed powerful people in their unit, anyone given to making cynical remarks and complaints etc.).⁹⁰ But as this initial stage of the movement, led by the work-teams dispatched by Liu Shaoqi, came to be discredited in the autumn of 1966, the Party Centre ordered that "[d]ossiers compiled by the various schools and units during the Cultural Revolution for the purpose of nailing the rank and file should be annulled. They should all be taken out and burned in public."⁹¹ Rebel organizations of workers, which grew rapidly during December 1966, like other Rebel groups made every effort to seize and destroy these 'black dossiers', a course which inevitably brought them into conflict with the political departments. Later, it even brought them into direct conflict with the military and Public

89 Yang Xiguang, 'Wenhua dageming dui shehuizhuyi zhidu tupo', *Zhishifenzi* 2, 3, Spring 1986, quoted in Unger, 'Whither China? ...', *Modern China* 17, 1, January 1991, 18-19. Yang is referring to the situation in Changsha specifically, where most workers supported the Rebel faction.

90 See Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 22.

91 *Ibid.*, 35. A translation of the document can be found in *SCMM* 617, 1-2.

Security organs, as local Party authorities, reluctant to destroy all the files they had compiled on trouble-makers, hung on to some material and in some cases made duplicates which were stored with these organs.⁹² In Guangzhou, Rebels made plans to storm Public Security offices and seize this material during April and May 1967, as well as planning attacks on jails to free their comrades imprisoned in the February military crackdown.⁹³

From the point of view of this study, the main development of the Cultural Revolution as far as workers are concerned is not that they followed either of the 'two lines' - Mao's revolutionary line, or the 'revisionist' line identified with Liu and Deng - because, as we have just seen, there were important elements of both programmes which were objectionable to at least some workers. The main point to be grasped is that during the Cultural Revolution, workers organized themselves, often in very large numbers, to defend their own interests and to promote their own views. These autonomous and representative organizations, which 'reflected the genuine but divided concerns of the workers'⁹⁴, proved extremely difficult for the authorities to bring back under control, in some cases defying the Party and the army in pursuit of their goals. Although workers, like the rest of Chinese society, divided into two factions, it would be wrong to assume that these corresponded to the 'two lines'. In fact, as Liu Guokai has pointed out, despite the accusations of its opponents, the Conservative faction was not pro-Liu:

They were out to defend the existing social order, because of vested interests. They had higher social status than others. They held more important

92 Ibid., 35.

93 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo' (Li Yizhe and me), *Beidou* 1, 1.6.77, 10.

94 Rozman, *A mirror for socialism*, 128.

positions and jobs and were paid higher wages. They enjoyed many privileges in their everyday lives. They were unanimous that Mao, not Liu, was the supreme representative of this social order.⁹⁵

Even though workers in groups belonging to the Conservative faction generally supported the existing order in society and in the enterprise, this did not always mean that the representatives of that order could control these forces once they were mobilized. Although there are many instances of direct manipulation or control of Conservative workers, which give credence to the image of Conservative workers' organizations as tools of those in authority who opposed real change in the Cultural Revolution, and although these organizations often included large numbers of 'nominal' members who either did not feel strongly about the actions they undertook or only went along with them because powerful people in their enterprise were in charge and they lacked the courage to resist, workers in these groups also had grievances of their own which prompted them to act, notably in the winter of 1966 when workers first became involved in the Cultural Revolution *en masse*. In the case of the Rebel faction, which came to see the whole of the new bureaucratic class as the source of its problems, it made no sense to draw a distinction between one section of the bureaucracy believed to support Liu and the other judged to be allied with Mao, and to oppose one and not the other. As we will see below, Rebel workers showed a distinct tendency to attack all cadres and all authority in their enterprises, incurring criticism from the Maoists in the leadership for their extremism, and opposed the 'liberation' or reinstatement of those cadres forced out of office in earlier phases of the Cultural Revolution when revolutionary

95 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 73.

committees were formed during 1968.⁹⁶ In general, 'the concentration on cadres and cadre behaviour suggests an anti-authority dimension to the movement, a model of conflict between leaders and led.'⁹⁷

Overall, it seems that despite their division into two strongly antagonistic factions during the movement, most workers were not responding directly to the manipulation of one or other faction in the top leadership of the Party, but acted with an unprecedented degree of autonomy and spontaneity. Whichever faction they joined, workers all seem to some extent to have shared in the experience of large-scale self-organization and independent political action and expression, in 'independent mass organizations which leant real power to the voice of workers for a fleeting period'⁹⁸. It is this which makes the Cultural Revolution a turning point, if not in terms of workers' achievement of their desired position and influence in the enterprise and beyond, then at least in terms of the autonomous collective action which might ultimately be able to bring this about.

Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou's enterprises: official and unofficial actions, May-December 1966

This study is not intended to provide a blow-by-blow account of the three years of the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou or elsewhere in China, but it is necessary to go into a certain amount of detail as, especially at the end of

96 See for example 'The present state of the movement in some factories in Guangzhou', *Guangzhou Gongren* 34, May 1968, in *SCMP* 4208, 7-16.

97 Blecher and White, *Micropolitics in contemporary China: A technical unit during and after the Cultural Revolution*, 104.

98 Walder, 'Some ironies of the Maoist legacy in industry', Selden and Lippit (eds.) *The transition to socialism in China*, 229.

1966 and the beginning of 1967, the situation changed markedly from week to week and even from day to day. What began in May as an effort to mobilize workers to criticize a small number of intellectuals singled out by the Party Centre in Beijing gave way, over the summer and early autumn of 1966, to more genuine protest activity in some enterprises by a minority of restive workers, with some involvement of student Red Guards. At first this activity seems to have been quite successfully suppressed by enterprise leaderships, but as workers' organizations, especially Rebel organizations, grew through November and December, mass action by workers became more and more common. When the existence of these organizations was legitimized by the CCRG in Beijing on November 17⁹⁹, the last important obstacle to workers' organizations was removed, and December and early January 1967 saw the nationwide outbreak of what became known as 'counterrevolutionary economism', or the 'evil wind of economism'. This movement in fact bore a close resemblance to the outpouring of workers' criticisms we saw in the spring of 1957, as the following description of Liu Guokai's, worth quoting at length, will show:

In an upsurge of democracy unprecedented since the founding of the People's Republic, the long-pent-up thoughts and reasonable demands of the masses all burst out like a flood from an opened sluice gate. The prolonged wage freeze, the delay in turning contract labour into regular workers, insufficiency of labour insurance, fringe benefits, and subsidies or employment for high school graduates, the assignment of dormitories, and overdue overtime compensation - in a word, all tumbled out as pressing problems... Once the masses in one unit took the first step to rise in rebellion, the news would spread to other units, and the masses there would immediately follow suit. In a rage, the rank

99 See Walder, 'Zhang Chunqiao and Shanghai's January Revolution', 28-31.

and file took the cadres to task, reprimanding them and complaining about the unreasonable treatment they had been subject to over the years. They accused the leadership of being relentless and brutal towards the workers and showing no concern for them, and they set forth their demands... those who had been poorly paid and had suffered horrendously in their working conditions and everyday lives were many. Therefore, the protests were manifestations of a genuine mass movement, much more vigorous than the campaign to criticize the bourgeois reactionary line.¹⁰⁰

Early developments in the spring and summer of 1966 did not show many signs of leading to a movement markedly different from the ongoing campaign for 'politics in command' and ideological revolutionization in enterprises. However, although in the course of the SEM cadres had already been prevailed upon 'to give up their privileges in housing, in children's education, and in life-style'¹⁰¹, as the experiences of the model Daqing oilfield began to be promoted more strongly, the shape of things to come in workers' relations with leading cadres emerged more clearly. It was stated that

The revisionists turn an enterprise practically into the private property of the bourgeois privileged stratum; they manage an enterprise by commandism, the imposition of penalties and the enforcement of

100 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 45-6. The existence of genuine grievances among workers which can account for 'economism', obviating the need to prove outside agitation or manipulation, is confirmed by Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 39-45, and Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers in the Cultural Revolution', especially 110-114.

101 Lee, *Industrial management*, 99.

rigid systems.¹⁰²

To counter this and implement the mass line in enterprises, workers were to have the right to elect basic-level cadres and to criticize cadres at any meeting.¹⁰³ For their part, cadres were to agree to forego special privileges:

They will not build office buildings, auditoriums, hostels, and reception houses; they will live in 'makeshift dwellings' or single-storey houses. They will hold no parties and present no gifts; they will neither dance nor put a sofa in their office. They will eat in collective dining rooms. And they will teach their children not to seek privileges for themselves.... They must persist in participating in physical labour and must never be bureaucrats sitting high above the people...¹⁰⁴

These ideas about the need for workers to elect their own leaders, who would be subject to recall and would not enjoy high pay or other special privileges, are at the heart of calls made later in the year, and especially during the 'January Storm' of 1967, for a new form of social and industrial organization based on the Paris Commune, by which the Rebels who advocated this form meant four main things:

the people govern themselves; they do this through elected leaders; these do not become a new and oppressive bureaucracy because they can be recalled at any time and do not get a higher wage than those

102 *Jingji Yanjiu* 4, 20.4.66, this translation revised version of SCMM 538, 8-27, in Andors, *Workers and workplaces in revolutionary China*, 254.

103 *Ibid.*, 256.

104 *Ibid.*, 271-2.

who elected them; and the people are armed.¹⁰⁵

Early in 1966, the development of this trend was foreshadowed by an article in *Hongqi* in praise of the Paris Commune, which emphasized the importance of this form of self-government in preventing a new regime from degenerating into the dictatorship of a privileged and exploitative elite after a successful workers' uprising.¹⁰⁶ As a contrast to this ideal, the article criticized the existence of privileges, high pay, corruption and widespread material incentives in Khrushchev's Soviet Union¹⁰⁷; the applicability of this criticism to the policies associated with 'China's Khrushchev', Liu Shaoqi, cannot have escaped many people. So even before the Cultural Revolution officially got underway, there were signs that a fairly radical reform of enterprise management and worker-cadre relations might be on the horizon.

During May and June 1966, workers' meetings and rallies were organized in Guangzhou for criticism of the intellectuals who were the very first targets of the Cultural Revolution, mainly the writers Deng Tuo and Wu Han. The main criticisms of these people attributed to 'progressive' workers and staff in official reports were concerned with their alleged claims (not made explicit in their writings, but quite clear to those at whom they were aimed, notably Mao), that the GLF had been a costly and disastrous failure which had brought only suffering to the ordinary Chinese people, and that the CCP despised the masses and ignored their views.¹⁰⁸ Workers were said to have countered these slanders with evidence of the progress made in their own industries and enterprises,

105 Mehnert, *Peking and the new left: at home and abroad*, 12.

106 *Hongqi* 4, 1.4.66, 4-18.

107 *Ibid.*, 14.

108 See the Guangzhou City Radio reports in *News from provincial radio stations (NPRS)* 158, 20-1 and 26-7, and 159, 23-4.

including the Guangzhou Iron and Steel Works and the construction and transport industries, during the GLF. It is notable that most of these rallies and forums involved only 'progressive' or model workers and staff who were politically reliable and had some standing in their workplaces; the right to participate in the Cultural Revolution was at this point still limited to those people of 'high political quality',¹⁰⁹ who would later mostly be found in the Conservative faction.

There was a change in the direction of the Cultural Revolution from August 1966, following publication of the 'CCP Central Committee Decision on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution',¹¹⁰ on August 8. This document defined the targets of the movement as 'capitalist roaders in authority in the Party' and 'bourgeois reactionary "authorities"',¹¹¹ thus indicating that this was not a campaign aimed at finding rightists among the ordinary people¹¹², but was aimed at those in power who had deviated from the correct line. This change of tack brought to an end the campaign against the obvious targets in enterprises - the 'usual suspects' mentioned above - but did not yet lead to any new developments within enterprises. Cultural Revolution Committees and Groups were set up in all units to direct the campaign, but since it was 'mostly mainstays from the previous period of the campaign, namely, persons with high "political qualities"',¹¹³ who were elected to these bodies, few attacks against 'capitalist roaders in authority' in enterprises transpired.

109 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 43.

110 Usually known as the '16-Point Decision', and reproduced in *Readings in the Chinese Communist Cultural Revolution*, 224-230.

111 Ibid., 224.

112 See Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 23-4.

113 Ibid., 24.

The '16 Point Decision' also stipulated that the Cultural Revolution was 'a powerful motive force for the development of the social productive forces', and should not be seen as any sort of obstacle to production; the masses were to be mobilized to 'grasp revolution and promote production' simultaneously.¹¹⁴ There were reports from various enterprises in Guangzhou that 'rules have been broken and difficulties resolved'¹¹⁵, as workers, influenced by their study of Mao's thought, abolished irrational rules and regulations¹¹⁶, including, in one plant, the system of checking on attendance by the use of attendance cards, something which was described as 'a big insult to workers' revolutionary spontaneity.'¹¹⁷ Since a system of 'revolutionary cards' was introduced to replace it, however, this was probably a very superficial change, more to do with the general trend of changing the names of enterprises and the foreign names of products and pieces of equipment than with any far-reaching reform of the regulations most resented by workers. Certainly there was still a very strong emphasis on channelling workers' enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution into production, so it seems that the movement was largely marking time on the factory floor, with no widespread moves to criticize cadres and only gestures in the direction of reforming enterprise management and organization in the way that many workers would have liked.

Indeed, even the limited sort of Cultural Revolution in enterprises which was sanctioned by the '16 Points' seems to have been denied to many workers at this stage, whatever their 'political qualifications'. The document

114 '16-Point Decision', 229.

115 *Guangzhou City Radio* 14.9.66, in *NPRS* 175, 28.

116 *Ibid.* 15.11.66, in *NPRS* 184, 23.

117 *Ibid.* 10.9.66, in *NPRS* 174, 49.

contained ambiguities, so that both the Party and enterprise leaders tended to interpret it in terms of its emphasis on production and discipline. For instance, workers' spare time was filled with endless rounds of meetings to discuss the problems of production and daily life. Workers who wished to exchange 'revolutionary experiences' were transferred from day to night shift or from one workshop to another so as to make it difficult for them to organize political activities. When workers did go to other factories or to file petitions to the higher echelons of authority they were charged with 'wrecking production' and undermining the 'Sixteen-point Resolution'.¹¹⁸

These are the usual tactics of enterprise leaders faced with awkward criticism from workers, and bear a close resemblance to the management methods we found employed under one-man management in enterprises up to 1956. As was mentioned earlier, contract workers protesting about their system of employment could be dealt with quite simply by being laid off, but it seems that even permanent workers could be kept under control at this stage of the movement using similar methods. It was later claimed that many workers, permanent and temporary, had been laid off or had their pay cut since the Cultural Revolution began¹¹⁹ as a direct result of their criticism of enterprise leaders. Thus we see that both the most 'politically reliable' permanent workers who were responding to the Cultural Revolution campaign by criticizing enterprise authorities, and temporary workers who had been restive for some time, were suppressed in a similar way at this point of the movement, fuelling their later demands for restitution and their enthusiasm for genuine participation in the Cultural Revolution.

118 Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 107.

119 Renmin Ribao 26.12.66, in SCMP 3852, 3.

As this phase of the Cultural Revolution unfolded, still under official direction, in Guangzhou's enterprises in August and September, with regular reports of excellent results and a 'double victory' in revolution and production¹²⁰, there were signs of other activity among less 'progressive' workers in some of the city's workplaces. This activity was undoubtedly linked to the Cultural Revolution call to criticize certain people in authority, but it may also have been connected with an announcement by the Guangdong CCP Provincial Committee on August 13 that the worker-peasant system was to be implemented in all enterprises in the province where conditions were suitable, and that all existing and future enterprises should start employing worker-peasants and reduce their permanent workforce.¹²¹ It is not clear how widely the worker-peasant or contract labour system had been implemented in Guangzhou prior to this announcement, but given that it was most common in light industries such as textiles and food-processing and in storage and transportation¹²², it would be surprising if it was not already quite widespread in the area.¹²³ Red Guard documents from a Labour Ministry Rebel group report that the urban contract labour system had been in force in Guangzhou since late 1956.¹²⁴

Some of the earliest signs of criticism and protest among workers in the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou in fact came from workers with 'high political qualifications', judging by

120 See for example *Renmin Ribao* 7.9.66, 1; *Guangzhou City Radio* 14.9.66, in *NPRS* 175, 27-8, and 15.10.66, in *NPRS* 179, 35-6.

121 See *Current Scene* 6, 5, 15.3.68, 7-8.

122 *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

123 Walder notes that these industries were also concentrated in Shanghai - 'Zhang Chungqiao', 41.

124 See *SCMM* 616, 22.

the recollections of middle-school Rebel activist Dai Xiao'ai¹²⁵. He recalled that workers 'had stepped forward in late May and early June to write big-character posters attacking technicians and engineers who paid too little attention to the study of Mao's writings', and that criticism of enterprise management was also 'unmistakeably implied' in this. These workers had not found much support for their views, and 'had consequently drawn quickly the counter-criticism of the confident factory leadership.'¹²⁶ We have just seen the sorts of methods used by enterprise leaders to stifle criticism like this later in the summer, after the promulgation of the 'Sixteen Points'. Rumours about the 'brutal suppression'¹²⁷ of these workers concerned the students and prompted them to make their first forays into industrial enterprises to try to make contact with workers.

But it should be remembered that these earliest instances of criticism by workers happened before 'capitalist roaders in authority' had been specified as the movement's main target, at a time when many people still saw the Cultural Revolution as an anti-rightist campaign targeted at members of the rank and file with bad class backgrounds or political records. These 'politically qualified' workers were thus speaking out against those cadres, especially technicians, who were often not of worker or other 'good' class origin and had benefitted from the Seventy Articles line in industry, with the encouragement of the Maoists at various levels of the Party and probably also of the political department cadres in their enterprises; their criticisms were in keeping with the policy of revolutionization and 'politics in command', but seem to have been suppressed by management cadres who stressed professional over political work. It is interesting to note

125 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard - The political biography of Dai Xiao'ai*, 55-6.

126 Ibid., 56.

127 Ibid., 57.

that both future Conservative workers and Rebels probably sympathized with attacks on arrogant technicians and bureaucratist managers, the main difference between them being that Rebels also had Party and political department cadres in their sights. This general support for management reforms in the direction of 'mass management' by workers may account for the progress made in some enterprises even in periods when Rebel workers, who exerted the strongest pressure against enterprise cadres, were subject to political or military suppression; more will be said about this later.

In contrast to the 'progressive' workers mentioned above, the August announcement about the implementation of the worker-peasant system in Guangdong is likely to have alarmed less secure, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, especially those in the industries where this system was most widely applied, who were likely to be among the first to lose their permanent status and urban residence. As has already been mentioned, there were signs of unrest related to the system even before the start of the Cultural Revolution¹²⁸, and so the announcement, together with the new focus of the movement on certain Party cadres who were said to be 'following the capitalist road', could be expected to encourage action among the workers most opposed to the general trend in enterprise management and employment systems prior to the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, although it was the plight of the 'progressive' workers who had first spoken out which had aroused the concern of Dai Xiao'ai and his fellow students, it seems to have been workers inclined towards the Rebel faction, especially younger workers, who responded with most enthusiasm when they made contact¹²⁹ and soon began putting up their own big-character posters in their unit criticizing the enterprise leadership.

128 See *Current Scene* 6, 5, 15.3.68, 6, 8.

129 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 59.

The students went to the unit where they had done their last stint of labour participation (part of the 'work-study' policy in education), which happened to be a warehouse, one of the enterprises most likely to be affected by the worker-peasant system. The management warned them against any activity which might disrupt production and clearly would have preferred them to leave and not interfere in the Cultural Revolution at that enterprise at all; for their part, the workers were 'unwilling to talk openly and freely'.¹³⁰ But the students did uncover 'opposition sentiments among a part of the workers'; a fairly typical list of grievances, in fact, which reflect workers' experiences since 1958 and in many cases could have come straight out of workers' contributions to the Wang Cai debate in Guangzhou in 1957. They included 'family difficulties to which the factory leadership paid no heed', many years of service in the same unit 'with little adjustment in wages',¹³¹ and the transfer of a worker's wife from the warehouse to the countryside.¹³² The students found that

other workers bore a grudge against the warehouse leadership for its bureaucratic style of work, staying always in their office and hardly ever descending into the shops to labour along with the workers.¹³³

130 Ibid., 58.

131 Ibid., 58.

132 I have not found any clear reference to support this, but it seems possible that women workers were more likely to lose their permanent status and benefits in enterprises than men, particularly given the fairly generous maternity benefits for which women union members were eligible, an expense which managers might be keen to avoid. Certainly women seem to have been among the first to be laid off by enterprises anxious to save on welfare expenses following the recent economic reforms in China.

133 Ibid., 59.

We do not need to labour the point of the similarity between these sentiments and those expressed by workers in 1957, and even in 1953.

Prior to the CCRG decision on November 17 that workers should be allowed to participate in the movement, exchanging revolutionary experiences outside working hours and setting up their own representative organizations¹³⁴, it was relatively easy for enterprise authorities to argue that the imperatives of stable production justified suppression of workers' protests. Rebel workers at the warehouse visited by Dai Xiao'ai's group were reportedly 'severely suppressed by the management'¹³⁵ after the students left, with the need to safeguard production cited to legitimize the authorities' action. Enterprise leaders generally were reluctant to allow students to intervene in the movement in enterprises:

They thought the students' intervention disruptive to production, and they were particularly worried that the undesirables in their factories, agitated by the students, might also become unruly.¹³⁶

As we have just seen, this was precisely what was likely to happen in enterprises where the build-up of grievances among a section of the workers needed very little encouragement to break out into open rebellion. But the strong emphasis through September and October on maintaining production and preventing student Rebels offering any support to restive workers meant that in Guangzhou, workers' protests 'faltered

134 'Twelve-point decision regarding the Cultural Revolution in factories and mines (draft)'; see Lee Lai To, *Trade Unions in China*, 108-9.

135 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 62.

136 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 42.

and nearly died out altogether'¹³⁷ during this period.

In contrast to the suppression of these early Rebels in the workforce, 'so-called conservative elements' among the workers, mainly union members¹³⁸, were much in evidence on the city streets during the autumn, mobilized by the provincial authorities to demonstrate against the student Red Guards who had come down from Beijing to promote the movement in the south. Although clearly the actions of these workers were being controlled by authorities in their enterprises and in the local Party and government, their own enthusiasm for the task was probably not negligible. We should remember that most Red Guards at this point were still the offspring of the 'five red' groups (Party cadres, PLA personnel, revolutionary martyrs, workers and poor peasants), with those from cadre backgrounds particularly prominent, and that despite the theoretical status of the working class as the leading class in Chinese society, the attitude of these students towards workers (and towards the offspring of workers and peasants as opposed to the other three 'red' categories) was often very condescending:

[T]hose who suffered most before 1949 (the workers and peasants) owed a debt of gratitude to the revolutionaries who liberated them. As the passive recipients who gained most from the efforts of revolutionary cadres, workers and peasants were not in a strong position to provide class education to the children of their liberators.¹³⁹

So resentment of the students' patronizing attitude towards workers and inflated sense of their own importance may have

137 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 60.

138 Ibid., 61.

139 Rosen, *Red Guard factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou*, 78.

encouraged these workers in their positive response to official mobilization against student Red Guards at this stage.

The Guangzhou press and radio stations' constant exhortations both to workers to stay at their production posts and concentrate on the Cultural Revolution in their own units, and to students not to interfere in the movement in enterprises, can be taken as evidence that the authorities did not wish to see the Cultural Revolution expand in scope to include large numbers of workers, and were concerned about the possibility of student agitation of discontented workers. However, alongside the calls for workers to be allowed to 'liberate themselves'¹⁴⁰ and run the movement in their units themselves, which were really aimed at stifling the development of the movement among workers, there clearly were also concerns about the clashes between workers and students which seemed to be occurring in various places.¹⁴¹ As well as the organized confrontations noted above between unionized workers from the larger state enterprises and student Red Guards, especially those from outside the city, the student Rebels were not always welcomed in enterprises even by the protesting workers they wished to support: 'Many rebel workers were extremely hostile to all forms of intervention from outside the plant.'¹⁴²

In part this was probably due to the same resentment of students' attitudes towards workers which made it relatively easy for local authorities to mobilize Conservative workers against the young Red Guards: students at a Red Guard conference in Guangzhou in September had to be reminded to

140 The insistence that 'The masses must liberate themselves' was included in the '16 Points'.

141 See for example *Hong Wei Bao* 9.9.66, in *SCMP* 3786, 11-15; *Renmin Ribao* 12.9.66, 1.

142 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 165.

'respect the revolutionary proposals and opinions of the masses'¹⁴³, and not simply take over the movement in the factories and direct it themselves. It seems likely that student Rebels were inclined to try to monopolize control and direction of the movement even in industrial enterprises. Certainly, once workers were allowed to organize themselves freely from mid-November, even those students who welcomed this development had some misgivings, being 'aware that [they] would soon have to share leadership responsibility with workers.'¹⁴⁴

Students in China have often tended to see themselves as the natural and rightful leaders of any movement of protest, harking back, as they did during the spring of 1989, to the intellectuals of the May Fourth era and their role in China's social and political development. Although they are often keen to have the support of other sections of (particularly urban) society, including workers, there is a noticeable tendency to guard their leading role and guidance over the direction of any movement quite jealously, and to regard workers as unsuited to playing anything more than a supporting role. Given their exclusion from any sort of political role since the founding of the People's Republic, it is perhaps not surprising that workers appropriated with such enthusiasm the slogan of 'the masses liberating themselves'¹⁴⁵ and resisted even the intervention of outside activists inclined to support their demands, determined to make the best use of this unprecedented opportunity to organize themselves.

When workers' organizations received official sanction in mid-November 1966, this was in part simply recognition of the

143 *Hong Wei Bao* 12.9.66, in *SCMP* 3786, 17.

144 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 144.

145 See *China News Analysis* 711, 7.6.68, 3-4, for the uses to which this slogan was put by workers resisting the PLA's reimposition of discipline in enterprises.

fact that workers were already active in the movement in many cities.¹⁴⁶ From early October, the campaign to criticize the 'bourgeois reactionary line' (the conduct of the Cultural Revolution under the work-teams sent out by Liu Shaoqi, who suppressed some individuals who had actually spoken out against power-holders in the first phases of the campaign) had in general encouraged more, and more genuine, mass involvement in the movement, since it turned criticism against Party leaders themselves for the first time and weakened the position of the 'five-red' elite who had monopolized leadership of the Cultural Revolution since the early summer.

Many people were at first inclined to regard this change in the campaign's direction as 'too good to be true',¹⁴⁷ especially those on whom 'black material' had been collected, and who were now told that all this material had to be destroyed. But as it became clear that this instruction was actually being carried out in some units, where it was an important part of the campaign against the 'bourgeois reactionary line', confidence grew:

Due to the widespread nature of this campaign ...
the broad ranks of people began to dare to rise up.
This happened around November and December of
1966.¹⁴⁸

Just as the ranks of student 'revolutionary rebels',¹⁴⁹
swelled during these months, so 'organizations of

146 See White, *Policies of chaos*, 233; Walder, 'Zhang Chunqiao', 28.

147 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 36.

148 Ibid., 37.

149 The name was adopted to distinguish them from the original Red Guards of the summer months, many of whom had cooperated with the work-teams.

"revolutionary rebels" from among factory workers ... also mushroomed.¹⁵⁰ During December 1966 and the first half of January 1967, workers used the freedom allowed them by the campaign to criticize the bourgeois reactionary line to 'give their superiors a piece of their mind without fear of being beaten down as anti-party, anti-socialist elements',¹⁵¹, turning on cadres in their enterprises and demanding action on all the grievances which had been building up over past years, in some cases dating right back to 1956-7, in a movement that was soon to be branded 'counterrevolutionary economism'.

Factional division among workers

Before going on to an examination of the phenomenon of 'economism' and the beginning of large-scale involvement of workers in the Cultural Revolution both inside and outside their enterprises, we should first consider where the division between Conservative and Rebel workers came in most cases, and how the different interests and aspirations of the two groups shaped their participation in the movement.

The conventional wisdom on workers during the Cultural Revolution for some time was the same as that for the Hundred Flowers period: it was said that workers' relatively privileged position in society and political status led them to stand aloof from protests and defend the Party from attacks by other social groups. As we saw, this view is something of a travesty of workers' actual activities in 1956-7 since it takes no account of the powerful wave of workers' protest and strikes which preceded as well as accompanied the well-known intellectual and student movement. The idea that some workers supported and defended Party authorities during the Cultural

150 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 43.

151 Ibid., 45.

Revolution is well-founded, but care must be taken not to overlook the importance of Rebel workers' militant opposition to these same authorities.

The main reason why Conservative workers' groups (who often called themselves 'Scarlet Guards' (zhiweidui) to distinguish themselves from the student Red Guards) have been taken as representative of workers in general is that they are judged to have constituted a numerical majority among industrial workers, particularly in the large, modern state enterprises. Rebel workers were almost always a minority in large enterprises¹⁵², which might lead one to assume that these groups were less important and less representative of workers' opinions in general than were the Scarlet Guards. However, as was mentioned earlier, one of the main developments of the Cultural Revolution was that workers formed their own large-scale organizations to press their own demands and put forward their own points of view; these organizations are highly significant whichever faction they were aligned with.

Another point which should not be overlooked is that there were severe pressures on workers not to stick their necks out by joining Rebel groups, especially in large enterprises where the influence of the Party and mass organizations and of the political and militia departments was strongest. Dai Xiao'ai and his fellow students soon realized once they made contact with them that many workers in Guangzhou were wary of any political involvement and particularly reluctant to express their true opinions, because

152 Even in a city such as Changsha where the majority of workers joined the Rebel faction, those at the larger enterprises tended to be less militant; see Unger, 'Whither China?...', *Modern China* 17, 1, 20. For the proportion of Rebel and Conservative workers in some of Guangzhou's main enterprises see Table 5 in Hong Yung Lee's *Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 135; Rebel workers in these enterprises constituted between 21% and 46% of the rank and file workforce.

they

were old enough to have had personal experience of the notorious anti-rightist campaign in 1957-58 ... The ones who had been most active in writing big-character posters and making known their ideas had even been struggled against and labelled as "rightists opposed to the Party and socialism".¹⁵³

Liu Guokai has gone into workers' factional division in some detail, describing those enterprise personnel with 'high political qualifications' and vested interests in their unit as the 'had-had-it-good' faction, while 'those workers who had always been cold-shouldered by the leadership can be called the "had-it-bad" faction.'¹⁵⁴ These latter of course existed in all enterprises to some extent (in the form of apprentices, unskilled, semiskilled or service workers, as well as workers from 'bad' class backgrounds and those with political problems or who had crossed swords with enterprise leaders before), but Liu points out that there were good reasons why they were not always willing or able to form a minority Rebel group.

In factories, particularly big factories, most of the "conservative" organizations were stable and powerful. This was because in big factories the old order had held powerful control. From the factory party committee, political department, and public security section down to cadres and staff members of the trade union and of youth and women's associations and even workshop superintendents and shift foremen joined the "conservative workers' organizations almost as a bloc. What could a rank-and-file worker do but throw in with the tide? The political and security cadres were "prestigious"

153 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 56.

154 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 79.

persons ... and the workers were used to obeying them. The consequences would be grave if anyone dared to disobey them by joining a "rebel" organization. One would be up against a formidable opponent and duly penalized. For instance, one could easily be transferred to an undesirable job. It was true the workers made up the majority, and if they were courageous enough to rebel the situation could be different ... But ... it was not easy for the majority of workers to rise to the occasion with spontaneous action. As a result, just a small number of backbone elements were able to coerce the rank-and-file workers to form organizations that really did not have genuine mass support.¹⁵⁵

Elsewhere Liu points out that it was possible for members of the 'had-it-good' faction to go against their apparent interests, at least covertly, and support the Rebels, perhaps because although their own position in the prevailing social order was a favourable one, relatives might have been unjustly persecuted in previous campaigns, causing them to question that social order.¹⁵⁶ And at the point in the summer of 1967 when Rebels had the upper hand in the cities, it was also possible for workers to conform and belong to Conservative organizations in their large factories in the suburbs, while 'at home in the cities they were "rebel" supporters.'¹⁵⁷ One last point to be considered when assessing the actual

155 Ibid., 75 (emphasis added). We have already seen that penalties such as unwanted transfers and wage deductions were readily applied to rebellious workers both in the 1950s and in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, so the fear was well-founded. Enterprises also had a great deal of material in workers' dossiers with which they could 'settle accounts' with their critics once the high point of the movement passed.

156 Ibid., 95-6.

157 Ibid., 96.

significance of Rebel workers is that, because of the pressures and possible penalties which restrained workers from Rebel allegiance, those who *did* form Rebel organizations 'had their own independent views of things and ... enormous capacity to get things done ... everyone who joined was self-motivated in some way; no one who was afraid of the consequences would dare to join. They therefore had more core members and fewer nominal ones, and their effectiveness could not be measured in numbers.'¹⁵⁸

Finally, something should be said about the nature of Conservative workers' organizations. Although they had obvious links with enterprise and other local authorities, these organizations were not only the creations and instruments of these forces. As we have just seen, even in solidly Conservative large factories Rebel sympathies existed, and people's factional allegiances did not correspond to their own vested interests in every single case. But, large numbers of the well-established, unionized, skilled and secure workers in big enterprises *did* have genuine reasons of their own for the actions they took, including joining the Conservative faction. For example, in Shanghai Scarlet Guards went on strike to protest against concessions made by the city government to Rebel contract and temporary workers, and dockers in the same city put forward their own 'economistic' demands to maintain wage differentials when contract workers received pay rises.¹⁵⁹ These outbreaks of Conservative 'economism' were later blamed on local Party manipulation and instigation, but there is evidence that the main impetus for the demands came from workers themselves.¹⁶⁰

158 Ibid., 44, 79.

159 Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 48-9; Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers in the Cultural Revolution', 102.

160 Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 48.

Economism and the attacks on the contract labour system

The mass movement unleashed, apparently unintentionally, throughout urban China in December 1966 was universally condemned a few weeks later even by those members of the CCRG, particularly Jiang Qing, who initially seemed inclined to back the demands of contract workers when these were presented to them late in December. Rebel students, too, were often in the forefront of the campaign to get workers to renounce the concessions made to them and return the back-wages which many had received¹⁶¹, urging them not to be fooled by the plot of 'capitalist roaders' in enterprises and local government, who were claimed to have tried to sabotage the Cultural Revolution by diverting workers' activity into economic demands with 'bribes' of back-wages and other payments. It was insisted that 'economism' could be traced back to these local Party and government leaders, who had first incited workers to make demands and then met them, thus disrupting production and causing losses to the state, in an attempt to force the leadership in Beijing to modify the Cultural Revolution which was now beginning to threaten local power-holders' own positions.

As Andrew Walder has pointed out, many Western accounts of the Cultural Revolution accept this explanation of economism in part or in whole¹⁶², but this is to ignore the fact that, as we have already seen, workers' resentment and protests on a variety of issues had actually been brewing for months if not years, and the suppression of their earlier attempts to use the Cultural Revolution to voice some of their demands and criticisms can only have added to the pressure. There is in fact no need to look for evidence of behind-the-scenes manipulation of workers, as it is entirely plausible

161 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 48.

162 Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 39.

that, under the unique conditions of the early Cultural Revolution when the usual controls on organizations independent of the Party had been lifted and all officials made legitimate targets of attack, workers seized a rare opportunity to press their demands, give vent to their anger and seek redress for some of the wrongs they felt had been done to them over the years.

It was a cry out of the bottom of the masses' hearts, a cry coming out spontaneously from thousands and thousands of people without prior consultation... There was no need to agitate them or to help them fall into ranks.¹⁶³

There is also the point that cadres may have conceded some of workers' demands quite simply because it would have been almost impossible to justify a refusal. One example of this is the 'economistic' disbursement of 'long-overdue overtime pay' and raising of the compensation limits on some medical insurance items¹⁶⁴. We have already seen how common unpaid and compulsory overtime was in Chinese enterprises even after the GLF, and medical bills seem to have been as much of a worry for workers and their families in the 1960s as they had been in 1956 in Guangzhou, when hospitals' 'detention' of workers' dependents unable to pay their bills caused such an outcry. There were also cases in Harbin and Shanghai, and probably elsewhere, of Rebel transport workers getting hold of official documents on wage levels and discovering that local governments and enterprises were paying workers less than they were authorized to do. It would have been extremely difficult for any cadre to refuse a demand for back-pay in this situation, and indeed workers

163 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 46.

164 Ibid., 46.

reportedly demanded and received payment of the difference between the authorized and actual levels of wages, retroactive for three years. Transport workers in Harbin reportedly received about 1,000 yuan each in back-wages, whereupon workers in other trades demanded and received similar payments.¹⁶⁵

In all of the above cases it would have been extremely difficult for cadres to categorize workers' demands as excessive or unreasonable, as workers had good grounds for insisting that they were only asking for what was due to them.

Probably the worst accusation which can be levelled at the cadres who made concessions is that they caved in to some genuinely unreasonable demands instead of adopting the correct course of explaining the state's difficulties to workers and persuading them to withdraw excessive demands. However, given the force of the movement it seems doubtful that such a course of action was a real possibility. After all, the same policy had been advocated by high-level union officials and the Party alike in 1957, when the ideal of the union cadre who would be able to reason with workers and explain to them why they should drop their demands was equally far from reality. In one 1957 case, two union cadres of the Shanghai Fertilizer Factory were marched to the banks of the Huangpu river by protesting workers and almost drowned in an attempt to force them to agree to workers' demands.¹⁶⁶ Like many aspects of the official unions' mandate, this policy for dealing with unreasonable or excessive demands sounded fine in theory but does not seem to have worked at all in practice, especially when cadres were confronted with '[l]arge groups of workers, fresh from a violent and ... bloody defeat, possibly still armed with clubs and stones, [and] probably in no mood to

165 *Current Scene* 6, 5, 13.

166 Elizabeth Perry, 'Shanghai's strike wave of 1957', forthcoming *China Quarterly*, March 1994, 24-5.

negotiate',¹⁶⁷ with them.

Articles attacking economism in the last weeks of January all concentrate on the supposed plot by capitalist roaders to disrupt production and corrupt workers' revolutionary will by giving them back-pay, bonuses, and travelling expenses for *chuanlian*¹⁶⁸, but in fact at least part of what was later condemned as the 'evil wind of economism' stemmed from the December 26 editorial in the *Renmin Ribao*. This article stressed the necessity for a vigorous and thorough Cultural Revolution in industrial enterprises, many of which were

seriously influenced in varying degrees by capitalism, revisionism and even feudalism in the fields of political ideology, organizational leadership, and production management. These influences not only shackle the workers' revolutionary enthusiasm and hinder the development of productivity, but also breed the seed of revisionism and are hotbeds for capitalist restoration.¹⁶⁹

While encouraging a new upsurge in the Cultural Revolution in enterprises in which the working class would be the 'leading force and the most active factor'¹⁷⁰, this article also revealed what had happened to many of the workers who had tried to speak out in the preceding few months, and barred enterprise cadres from taking similar retaliatory measures in future:

The Party Central Committee has ruled that ... no

167 Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 48.

168 'Linking up', i.e. travelling to other units all over the country to exchange revolutionary experiences.

169 *Renmin Ribao* 26.12.66, in *SCMP* 3852, 2.

170 *Ibid.*, 1.

leaders of industrial and mining enterprises should strike at and retaliate upon the workers who have put forth criticism and disclosed facts, nor are they to reduce the wages of these workers, to discharge these workers from their posts, and, for the same reason, to discharge contract workers or temporary workers ... all those wrongly accused of being 'counter-revolutionaries' must be vindicated. Transfer of any post in production is disallowed. Threatening and persecution of dependents of workers is also disallowed. Revolutionary workers who have been struck off and forced to leave their factories must be allowed to return to their factories to participate in production and in the cultural revolution. *These revolutionary workers should be given any wages which were held up when they were forced to leave the factory.*¹⁷¹

These provisions for payment of back-wages to at least some of the workers, permanent and temporary, who had been laid off or sacked because of their protest activities, however limited they were intended to be, nonetheless paved the way for an even greater upsurge in 'economistic' demands.

This was particularly true of contract and temporary workers, one of the most discontented and rebellious groups in the whole of the Chinese workforce, representatives of whom were widely reported in wall-posters to have met with Jiang Qing on the evening of December 26 and to have received her full support for their claims. Posters in Guangzhou dated January 4 1967 reported that Jiang 'had denounced officials of the Ministry of Labor and of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions for permitting the worker-peasant system to exist.'¹⁷² Liu Guokai gives a similar account of workers'

171 Ibid., 3 (emphasis added).

172 Current Scene 6, 5, 15.3.68, 9.

representatives' reception by members of the CCRG:

On December 25, the Ministry of Labor in Beijing was closed down by petitioners. The next day Jiang Qing received the petitioners, and right in front of them she reprimanded Xi Zhanyuan, vice-minister of labor. She said: 'The Ministry of Labor is simply a Ministry of the Lords. Even though the country has been liberated for so many years, the workers are still suffering so much; it is unbelievable. Does your Ministry of Labor know about this or not? Do you mean to say that contract workers are the offspring of a stepmother? You, too, should work as a contract worker!' Saying this, Jiang even burst into tears.¹⁷³

News of this support for the contract workers' cause spread throughout the country via telephone calls and posters 'at lightning speed ... People were overjoyed, people were excited, and they were ready to whip up an even more powerful wave.'¹⁷⁴ Although signs soon appeared of a backlash against 'economism', particularly with regard to contract and temporary workers¹⁷⁵, condemnations of the worker-peasant system continued to appear in the press and in wall-posters.

173 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 47.

174 Ibid., 47.

175 Wall-posters in Shanghai in January also reported a later meeting between contract workers' representatives and Zhou Enlai, at which Zhou insisted that the contract labour system had to be maintained because of conditions in China (Current Scene 6, 5, 10), while on January 9 some 'revolutionary organizations' in Shanghai published their 'Urgent Notice' attacking economism and laying down guidelines for a reimposition of discipline in industry; Mao ordered the 'Notice' to be broadcast nationally on January 9, and it was reprinted in the *Renmin Ribao* on January 12.

Some posters alleged that Liu Shaoqi and the Labour Ministry were planning to halt all hiring of permanent workers from 1967, and that all demobilized soldiers would henceforth be hired on a contract basis.¹⁷⁶ The second of these allegations is particularly significant for Guangzhou, where one of the largest and most militant of the Rebel groups was the August 1 Combat Corps, formed in mid-January 1967, the majority of whose members were demobilized soldiers now working in factories or neighbourhood labour service stations.¹⁷⁷ Many of these ex-servicemen had joined the labour force during the GLF and in the years immediately after, and so formed part of the group of 'new workers' which we noted before as being disadvantaged in comparison to more established workers, in terms of pay and conditions and especially job security.

Most soldiers demobilized around 1955 and 1956 found promising new jobs in recently collectivized enterprises and farms, but those demobilized in the late 1950s and early 1960s had difficulty finding comparable opportunities. Many veterans complained that local officials failed to give them good work or adequate welfare for their dependents.¹⁷⁸

The rumour that demobilized soldiers would now only be employed on a contract basis removed any prospect of permanent, secure employment for an already disadvantaged group, fuelling the radicalism of these workers who already felt they had little to lose in becoming actively involved in the Cultural Revolution, in sharp contrast to the most privileged and secure members of the industrial workforce.

176 See the quotation in *Current Scene* 6, 5, 10; also the Red Guard document translated in *SCMM* 616, 29-30.

177 See Hai Feng, *An account of the Cultural Revolution in the Canton area*, 61-2.

178 Vogel, *Canton under communism*, 342.

Given the August 1966 announcement of the widespread implementation of the worker-peasant system in all Guangdong enterprises, too, many workers would have found rumours of a universal contract-labour system very easy to believe, and this news would not only threaten workers who might be included in such a system in the future, but would also make the chances of a transfer to permanent status for any of those already employed on a contract or temporary basis extremely remote. Add to this the fact that large numbers of contract and temporary workers had recently been laid off because of the disruption caused by the Cultural Revolution itself¹⁷⁹, and it is not surprising that this section of the workforce was so militant in pressing its demands, forming a national organization to do so as early as the beginning of December 1966.¹⁸⁰

The political content and significance of workers' 'economistic' demands is perhaps most obvious in the case of the revolt of contract and temporary workers. While this system of employment had clear benefits in terms of cost savings for the state, it was not easy to find any ideological justification for giving enterprises such total power over a group of workers.

From the contract workers' point of view, the system was obviously "anti-socialistic" ... [They] were not eligible for fringe benefits, such as medicare, accident insurance, job security, retirement pensions, sick leave, and so forth. In contrast even to the capitalist market system, in which the law of supply and demand generally sets up the wage and the labor unions protect the interests of the workers vis-à-vis the owners, in a socialist economy

179 See Hong Yung Lee, *The politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 131.

180 The National Red Workers' Rebel Headquarters; *ibid.*, 137.

in which the management is strongly motivated toward profit there is no such mechanism to protect the interests of contract workers. The absolute power regarding contractual conditions for hiring rested in the hands of the enterprise.... In some places, the management asked for monthly renewals of the contract in order to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the contract workers.¹⁸¹

It should also be noted that contract workers were discriminated against politically as well as economically: besides being excluded from the union, they also had no right to participate in institutions such as the workers' congress and could not take part in political study classes.¹⁸² It was thus quite easy for the workers affected to attack the system as one which 'divides workers into two strata, creating differences, disintegrating the ranks of the workers, eliminating revolutionary enthusiasm, and obstructing the development of the social productive forces.'¹⁸³

Since the contract labour system had obvious benefits, both financially and in terms of control and leverage over workers, for enterprise management as it was constituted in the mid-1960s, it was particularly hard to counter workers' accusations that the system was a manifestation of Liu Shaoqi's 'bourgeois reactionary line' and the Seventy Articles' emphasis on 'profit and money in command' and strict control in enterprises. At a rally of more than a hundred thousand temporary and contract workers in Shanghai on January

181 Ibid., 131.

182 Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 45.

183 Laodong Zhanbao, 3.2.68, quoted in Hong Yung Lee, *Politics of the Cultural Revolution*, 131.

6 1967¹⁸⁴, workers were reported to have called on the Party to 'thoroughly abolish the irrational system of contract labour and outside contract labour and establish a brand new labour system in conformity with Mao Zedong's thought.' The *Wen Hui Bao* report described these systems as 'remnants of the capitalist system of labour employment'.¹⁸⁵ Articles in *Red Guard* newspapers during January praised worker-peasants elsewhere who had

"destroyed the reactionary bourgeois line of Liu and Deng and their system of contract and temporary work which harmed the workers". The system was described as an attempt to "raise the greatest amount of cheap labour and to extract the maximum profits".¹⁸⁶

Contract workers in Shanxi also couched the issue in similar terms:

"[O]ver 95% of the workers in our construction brigade in the Xi'an Metallurgical and Electrical Industry are temporary and contract workers and we have suffered just as bitterly as our comrades under the old society." Workers in Xi'an had demanded abolition of the temporary and contract work system at the commencement of the Cultural Revolution, the article stated. Provincial Party leaders reportedly responded that the system was laid down by the CCP Central Committee, "but we exposed this by saying

184 By the time the Cultural Revolution began, there were estimated to be ten million contract workers in China, and in some enterprises they constituted 95% of the workforce (Hong Yung Lee, 130). Shanghai, like Guangzhou, had large numbers of these workers as it was a regional and national centre for light industry and transportation.

185 *Wen Hui Bao* 6.1.67, quoted in *Current Scene* 6, 5, 11.

186 *Current Scene* 6, 5, 11.

that it was laid down by the revisionist Liu Shaoqi."¹⁸⁷

It is not clear whether workers emphasized the system's links with Liu Shaoqi because they were aware of the danger of a direct attack on the Party centre as a whole, or because they genuinely held the 'bourgeois reactionary line' responsible for the system. There is something in the accusation that Liu was ultimately responsible, and Red Guard publications, especially those produced by Labour Ministry Rebels¹⁸⁸ gave workers plenty of evidence to support this, so it is possible that workers 'believed that the hardships they had suffered in the past were the result of a bourgeois reactionary line executed by leaders at different levels, while the party centre under Mao still cared about them.'¹⁸⁹ Whatever the answer, it clearly suited both workers and that section of the Party opposed to Liu Shaoqi to make him the main scapegoat for the system.

Despite later official attempts to portray workers' actions in December and January as solely concerned with economic demands, and therefore a dangerous diversion from the real business of a political mass movement, it is clear both that political demands were also raised, and that even purely economic demands had some political content and significance. This applies not only to the temporary and contract workers discussed above, who couched their grievances in terms which reflected the political concerns of the Cultural Revolution itself, namely the struggle against the bourgeois reactionary line and revisionism, but to many others who found themselves in the Rebel camp. Wylie has noted that criticism of the employment system and differentiation between types of worker

187 Ibid., 11.

188 See SCMM 616, 21-28.

189 Liu Guokai, *A brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 46.

on the Shanghai docks inevitably called into question the authority of the Party Committee there:

Since the Party authorities were closely identified with this economic system, the workers' economic discontents were often voiced as criticisms of the Party Committee's political authority. Similarly, those dockers seeking to challenge the political authority of the Party often appealed to the economic grievances of the rank and file in order to gain support.¹⁹⁰

Back in the 1950s, workers were already aware that 'economic cleavages and concerns ... were inextricably linked to the policies of the new socialist state', and so tended to direct their protests at state, enterprise, Party and union cadres.¹⁹¹ In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, 'revisionists' and those who had implemented Liu Shaoqi's line in industry were legitimate targets of attack, giving new impetus and a distinctly anti-authority and political character to this outbreak of workers' rebellion.

Common accusations made against Party and management authorities were that they were 'adopting superior airs and a bureaucratic workstyle, refusing to carry out the mass line', implementing individual prize and bonus systems which 'set worker against worker', and that cadres were 'reluctant to leave their offices, avoiding physical labour ..., enjoying high salaries and personal privileges, and favouring certain workers over others in assignments and promotions.'¹⁹² These are of course exactly the sort of grievances which we have seen building up throughout the 1960s and in some cases even

190 Wylie, 'Shanghai Dockers', 93.

191 Perry, 'Shanghai's strike wave of 1957', forthcoming *China Quarterly*, March 1994, 29-30.

192 Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers', 97.

earlier; similar points were raised by workers at the Guangzhou Chemical Works in 1964, and by the warehouse workers contacted by Dai Xiao'ai's group of student activists earlier in 1966. While it is important to remember that economic grievances were real¹⁹³, workers' most important complaints centred on their position and rights in the enterprise, their relationship with their leaders, and the 'highly political issue of authority'¹⁹⁴; in sum, on whether or not they were the 'masters of the enterprise' in any meaningful sense. This should come as no surprise since it was precisely this issue which brought workers into conflict with Party and state authorities immediately after liberation and again in 1956-7.

So for many Rebels in enterprises, '[d]istribution questions were only part of the problem, but the issues of authority and morality were more important ultimately.'¹⁹⁵ What concerned workers was not just who had authority in the workplace, but also how that authority was exercised, 'a decision-making method and a work-style. Officiousness and snobbery were more than marginal concerns of many rebels.'¹⁹⁶ We have already seen that attempts to reinforce the theoretical political equality and 'comradely relations' of workers and cadres, mainly by compelling the latter to give up the attitude of 'bureaucrats riding over the heads of the people' and participate in labour, had made little progress in the nine years since they began, and the question of whether cadres were 'leaders' or 'rulers' was clearly still a

193 Most workers' wages had remained at roughly the same level since the GLF under the CCP's policy of wage stabilization (Wylie, 99); and apprentices were forced to train for three years on very low pay when most could master their jobs comfortably in six months, making them one of the most aggrieved and active groups in Guangzhou and elsewhere (Current Scene 6, 5, 21).

194 Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers', 104.

195 Andors, *China's industrial revolution*, 167.

196 Ibid., 167.

contentious one. Objections to the typical Seventy Articles policies of rigid division of labour and tight control over workers in the enterprise also surfaced again as Rebels spoke out during the Cultural Revolution:

Arbitrary controls over workshop communications and regimentation of the pace of production, based on quotas made by functionaries in factory offices, antagonized enough people to fuel the rebels' spark.¹⁹⁷

Morality entered into workers' considerations where they focused not just on questions of their own individual material benefits, but rather on 'the relative distribution between workers and managers. They attacked privileges both on and off the job.'¹⁹⁸ In the context of workers' rebellions in Poland, J M Montias has observed that workers often refrain from overtly political protests and demands as they are well aware of the likely consequences, namely swift suppression and retribution. However, there are signs that political and moral issues are important in workers' protests:

[I]t is evident both from [workers'] formal complaints and from the points formally raised at meetings with officials, that justice and human dignity - including the right to have a say in working conditions and other pertinent matters - are issues that are virtually as basic to the interests of Polish workers as prices, wages and working hours.¹⁹⁹

197 Ibid., 167.

198 Ibid., 168.

199 Montias, 'Observations on strikes, riots, and other disturbances', Triska and Gati (eds.), *Blue-collar workers in Eastern Europe*, 182.

Chinese workers seem to share this attitude, strongly objecting to their exclusion from decision-making which affects their working lives, and showing deep resentment of cadres' high-handed and arrogant disposal of questions of direct concern to them.

Given this concern both with the power exercised by cadres in the enterprise and the way in which they exercised it, and with particular attention to questions of privilege and lack of accountability, there are clear connections between the issues which were of greatest importance to workers in the Cultural Revolution and the developing Rebel paradigm of Chinese society, which saw the main social division as between the masses below and a privileged and exploitative 'red capitalist' minority with power above.²⁰⁰ Thus workers' involvement in the Cultural Revolution cannot be construed as marginal and concerned only with narrow economic issues, despite the fact that only a minority were active Rebels. Nor, however, should the possible political significance of industrial action in support of economic demands itself be neglected: Montias finds that of ten major disturbances in the communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1977, eight 'had their origin in economically motivated work stoppages.'²⁰¹

Power seizures and the anti-economism backlash

As was mentioned earlier, the first attack on economism came in the form of the 'Urgent Notice' published by a number of 'revolutionary rebel' organizations in Shanghai; this was broadcast nationally on January 9 and published in the *Renmin Ribao* on January 12, and a similar notice put out by various

200 See Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions', *Journal of Contemporary China* 1, 1, Fall 1992, 70.

201 Ibid., 175.

groups in the city was broadcast on Guangzhou City Radio on January 16.²⁰² The tone and content of the 'Urgent Notice' suggest both that 'economism' was extremely widespread, and that what was happening all over China constituted a mass movement which had taken central authorities by surprise and run completely out of control. The Notice represents a concerted effort to regain control over the Cultural Revolution, if necessary by arresting all those who deviated from the correct line and direction for the movement as laid down by Mao. It was made very clear that

all those who have opposed Chairman Mao, Vice-Chairman Lin, and the CCRG, and all those who have sabotaged the Cultural Revolution and production will immediately be arrested by the PSB in accordance with the law.... all those who violate the above [anti-economism] provisions will immediately be punished as saboteurs of the Cultural Revolution.²⁰³

As well as calling a halt to *chuanlian* and demanding that all expense money received for travelling to other units and cities be repaid, in instalments if necessary, the document laid stress on workers' and cadres' duty to stay at their posts and work their normal eight-hour day, and called on all personnel to return to their original units to 'grasp revolution and promote production'. In addition, enterprise funds were frozen to prevent any further unauthorized payments to workers making 'economistic' demands, and the issues of 'wage adjustments, back-pay and welfare' were shelved until the final stages of the Cultural Revolution 'to avoid shifting the overall direction of the struggle'.²⁰⁴ The scale of

202 See NPRS 191, 44-9.

203 Renmin Ribao 12.1.67, 2.

204 Ibid., 2.

economism is revealed by the myriad articles condemning it in all newspapers during the second half of January, all of which blame 'reactionaries' and local Party power-holders for inciting workers to forget state, collective and long-term interests and demand immediate individual benefits. However, it is evident that despite this outpouring of official and unofficial criticism, there was some recognition of the strength of feeling behind workers' demands and protests, and perhaps even of their legitimacy, as the problems raised were not dismissed out of hand, but had their solution postponed to a later stage of the movement.²⁰⁵ Similarly, although temporary and contract workers were banned from setting up their own organizations in February 1967, power-holders were forbidden from taking 'class reprisal' against them and they were accorded the same political (but not economic) rights as other workers, showing that their protests had been justified in part.²⁰⁶

It is interesting that many Rebel students supported the anti-economism campaign, accepting the allegation that workers' demands all stemmed from a plot by a few 'capitalist roaders' in enterprises:

Student organizations that had had no direct involvement in economic affairs now assumed the role of firefighters, serving as Mao's tool in cracking down on the movement. Students who had no worries about daily necessities and had never tasted the burden of providing for a family ran into the factories to publicize the 'emergency notice' and the two 'circulars' from the centre, calling upon the workers not to be taken in by capitalist roaders and to return the overtime pay and retroactive wages they had already received so that they could fight

205 *Guangming Ribao* 16.1.67, in *SCMP* 3870, 4.

206 *Current Scene* 6, 5, 16.

back with their concrete actions the evil trend of "counterrevolutionary economism" and smash the new conspiracy of the "bourgeois reactionary line".²⁰⁷

Students' enthusiasm for the anti-economism campaign may explain why in mid-January, attacks by workers on revolutionary rebel students were still said to be a serious problem in some Guangzhou enterprises.²⁰⁸ In Shanghai, some Rebel leaders on the docks also responded to the assault on economism, attempting to persuade workers to concentrate on the overthrow of the local Party first and then turn to economic problems, but many workers argued that political and economic reforms were not incompatible and could be pursued simultaneously. This case features the same sort of split between a minority which, like the students, followed the ideological line laid down by the centre, and the rank and file who were reluctant to abandon what seemed to them eminently reasonable demands.²⁰⁹ One Hong Kong commentator considers Rebel students' failure to support workers' demands their greatest mistake in the Cultural Revolution, since it made workers view them as 'tails of the power-holders' and keep their distance instead of uniting with the students.²¹⁰

Alongside attacks on and measures to combat typical examples of 'economism', such as the payment of unauthorized back-wages, bonuses and travelling expenses, we also find indications in many articles and broadcasts that there had been political developments during the weeks of mass involvement in the Cultural Revolution which had pushed it in a direction not entirely to the central leadership's liking.

207 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 48.

208 Guangzhou Radio 16.1.67, in *NPRS* 191, 46.

209 See Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers', 115-6.

210 See 'Li Yizhe dazibao pingjie' (Evaluating the Li Yizhe big-character poster), *Shiyue Pinglun* 13, 15.1.76, 14.

Although a call for 'extensive democracy' had been made at the beginning of the year, when the involvement of workers and peasants in the movement was hailed as a new stage of the Cultural Revolution, two weeks later warnings were being given about 'ultra-democracy' and 'extreme democratization'.²¹¹ The latter term is familiar to us from both of the previous confrontations between workers and the authorities which we have examined; in all cases, it indicates that workers are acting independently of the Party and attempting to enlarge their own role and influence in the enterprise and in society as a whole. Through March and April the preferred term changed from 'extreme democracy' to anarchism²¹². It might be expected that the accusation of anarchism was a misapplication of the term to indicate nothing more sinister than the chaos and disorder in many enterprises, but in fact its use seems to have been not entirely inaccurate in at least some cases, when it was applied to the tendency of some workers 'to oppose, negate, exclude and overthrow all the cadres'.²¹³ Clearly the struggle in many enterprises and industries during late December and January had not been confined to wage and welfare-related demands, but had in some cases included a comprehensive assault on enterprise authorities.

Power seizures at the provincial level were encouraged by the CCRG throughout January 1967, and occurred both on the 'Paris Commune' model, as in Shanghai, and on the Heilongjiang

211 See for example *Renmin Ribao* 12.1.67, 3; *Guangming Ribao* 16.1.67, in *SCMP* 3870, 3; *Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio* 28.2.67, in *NPRS* 197, M1.

212 See for example *Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio* 15.3.67, in *NPRS* 199, M4-9; *Xinhua News Agency* 18.3.67, in *SCMP* 3904, 8.

213 *Guangzhou Radio* 31.3.67, in *NPRS* 201, M13 (emphasis added). This broadcast refers specifically to the struggle in the Guangzhou Railway Sub-bureau, where 50,000 unskilled workers in the Guangzhou Railway Workers' Headquarters (Rebel faction) opposed the 10,000-strong Spring Thunder group of skilled workers, engineers and cadres (Hong Yung Lee, *Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 133).

'triple combination' model, which was eventually adopted as official policy and promoted as an example to follow nationwide, the main problem with the 'Commune' form being that it left no room for the leading role of the Party.²¹⁴ But power seizures also seem to have occurred at the enterprise level during January and February 1967. The picture of what was happening in enterprises and throughout cities during these months is unclear, and most of our information on events has to be pieced together from later accounts. However, what we can tell from these later references is that there were widespread work stoppages involving industrial production and transportation, and that most cadres either stepped aside from their posts under the pressure of the movement or were forced out by Rebel workers. In Guangzhou there were also attacks on PSB stations and even army installations by some Rebel groups, who were probably attempting to seize the 'black material' on many Rebels held there. Rebels were of course also angry at the failure of the army to support them; more will be said about this later. The above indications of what was happening in cities give us some idea of the seriousness of the situation from the point of view of the authorities, and explain the stringent measures advocated for 'strengthening the proletarian dictatorship', i.e. clamping down on protests through police action, contained in the 'Notices' on economism.

Recalling the 'January Revolution' in the famous 'Whither China?' article, Yang Xiguang indicated that industrial power seizures then had been both common and extremely popular with workers:

The bureaucrats had tried to intimidate workers before the revolution, saying, "Without us, production would collapse, and the whole of society would be in a state of chaos." ... As a matter of

214 See the discussions in P N Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 111-2, and Walder, 'Zhang Chungqiao', 60-3.

fact, without the bureaucrats and bureaucratic organs, productivity was greatly liberated... The management of industrial plants by the workers themselves after January was really moving. For the first time the workers felt that it was not the state which managed them, but they who managed the state. For the first time they felt that they were producing for themselves. Their enthusiasm was never so high and their sense of responsibility as masters of the house was never so strong.²¹⁵

It is very noticeable that although first reports of industrial power seizures all note approvingly that workers themselves had set up new Revolutionary Production Committees in their enterprises, using the election methods of the Paris Commune whereby delegates could be recalled by workers at any time and had no special titles or privileges²¹⁶, in only one case reported in the official press at the time was it stated that all former staff in an enterprise had been relieved of their posts, despite their expertise, in an effort to wipe out bureaucratism in the plant.

Some suggested that, since the members of the former staff were very "shrewd" in management, they could be kept to take care of technical matters. But the majority disagreed, arguing that revolution meant complete severance with the old and blazing a new trail entirely. Any idea of reconciliation and compromise must be rejected. So the former functionaries were relieved of their posts and went to work in the workshops.²¹⁷

215 Shengwulian, 'Whither China?', *Guangyin Hongqi* 5, March 1968, in *SCMP* 4190, 3-4.

216 See for example *Renmin Ribao* 14.1.67, 3; *Xinhua News Agency* (Shanghai) 15.1.67, in *SCMP* 3863, 2-3; *Renmin Ribao* 24.1.67, in *SCMP* 3879, 18-20.

217 *Xinhua News Agency* 23.1.67, in *SCMP* 3869, 2.

This case occurred in Shanghai before the Commune form was abandoned in favour of 'triple combinations', which always included some former cadres, and before concern about the number of cadres leaving or being forced out of their posts became widespread.²¹⁸ It seems that the trend of removing all cadres from their posts never gained official approval in most places and was soon corrected even in Shanghai, and as the weeks passed it was emphasized more and more often that the majority of cadres (95% was the figure often given) were 'good or relatively good'²¹⁹ and should be judged on their whole record, not just on a few recent mistakes. The very frequency of these restatements of the 'correct' cadre policy, however, indicates that many unreported power seizures were still occurring in which all cadres stood aside or were overthrown by Rebel workers.

Power seizures took place in a number of enterprises in Guangzhou during the January Revolution, and seem to have been dominated by Rebel workers. We know this because after the March military suppression of the Rebel faction in Guangzhou, when many Rebel organizations were branded 'counterrevolutionary' and banned, accounts of events in factories stressed that January power seizures had involved 'counterrevolutionary organizations' rather than the 'genuine proletarian revolutionaries', i.e. the Conservative faction, which had PLA support. A Red Guard publication from Guangzhou provides further evidence of Rebel dominance in enterprise power seizures in early 1967, reporting that in the first half of February 1967, workers' Rebel organizations were growing in the city while Conservative 'Scarlet Guards' were disintegrating. Given what we know about the situation in Guangzhou and elsewhere in China at this point, there is no reason to disbelieve this claim.²²⁰ One example of the rapid

218 See *Renmin Ribao* 11.2.67, in *SCMP* 3884, 3-6.

219 *Guangzhou Radio* 31.3.67, in *NPRS* 201, M14.

220 *Guangzhou Hongweibing* 14, 10.2.67, in *SCMP* 3929, 2.

growth of a Rebel organization in Guangzhou is that of the August 1 Combat Corps. With five thousand members at its founding on January 15, 'in the struggle to seize power, it achieved rapid growth and expanded to about 80,000 members in city districts, in addition to approximately 30,000 in counties outside the city proper.'²²¹

Two cases of power seizure by Rebels in Guangzhou will show how their hold on power tended to be rather short-lived, being ended in both cases by the intervention the PLA on behalf of the 'genuine proletarian revolutionaries', i.e. Conservative veteran workers, activists and cadres. In one case, that of the Guangzhou Auto Repair and Assembly Plant, Rebel workers had evidently set up a new management body of their own in the enterprise, the 'Plant Revolutionary Joint Committee'²²², and seized power.

A tiny handful of Party power-holders taking the capitalist road colluded with a few heads of the "Plant Revolutionary Joint Committee". They deceived the masses who did not know the truth into seizing the seal of authority. Afterward they directed the spearhead at the genuine proletarian revolutionaries and imposed a reign of white terror.²²³

221 Hai Feng, *Cultural Revolution in the Canton area*, 62. The August 1 Combat Corps was of course one of the largest of all Rebel organizations in the city, but some others, notably the railway 'coolies' (unskilled workers) also numbered their members in the tens of thousands. Rebel workers in large enterprises, as was indicated earlier, would usually constitute less than half of the rank and file workforce, and therefore would more often be numbered in the hundreds, but in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution before they were banned, district or city-wide groups could be far larger than this.

222 *Guangzhou Ribao* 2.4.67, in *SCMP* 3961, 16. The Committee's title is in inverted commas throughout the article to indicate its lack of legitimacy.

223 *Ibid.*, 16.

This analysis, blaming a minority of leaders for 'hoodwinking' the masses, is standard in Cultural Revolution attacks on any organization or event lacking official approval. The reference to the involvement of power-holders may indicate that some cadres participated in the Rebel power seizure; Rebel sympathies among higher-level, political department and militia cadres are almost unheard of, but this is not true of all other basic-level cadres.²²⁴

The Rebel 'handful' in the plant were said to have encouraged economism among the workers, thereby damaging production, and this was only stopped by the intervention of typical Conservative faction adherents among the plant's personnel, 'old workers, production group leaders, political cadres, activists in studying Chairman Mao's works, and five-good workers', on the side of the PLA.²²⁵ The PLA in Guangzhou interpreted their task of 'supporting the left' in the Cultural Revolution as an instruction to support the Conservative groups with whom they had a natural affinity; they were hardly likely to judge the Rebels to be 'genuine proletarian leftists' when these groups

stormed the party and government offices, seized hold of dossiers and documents, closed down and took over newspapers, and singled out and struggled against cadres at will, all of which were seen by the military as outrageous and lawless acts.²²⁶

On top of this, some Rebel groups in Guangzhou had of course

224 See Hong Yung Lee's table of factional divisions in Guangzhou enterprises, *Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 135.

225 Ibid., 17.

226 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 59.

specifically attacked the military and the PSB²²⁷, making it still more unlikely that they would gain PLA support themselves.

At the Guangzhou Power Plant, a similar January Revolution power seizure was reported, and it was alleged that 'a handful of people' and 'counterrevolutionary organizations' had conspired 'to concoct an incident of power stoppage and to sabotage the great Cultural Revolution.'²²⁸ Here, the PLA cooperated with 'revolutionary workers and staff' and 'revolutionary cadres' to defend the plant, maintain production, correct those workers 'led astray' by the counterrevolutionaries, and restore discipline. But this was not achieved without opposition, as the 'handful' denounced the PLA unit themselves as 'power-holders' and 'incited the workers to put up big-character posters' criticizing them.²²⁹ But order seems to have been restored with military assistance, and it was reported that production targets were now being over-fulfilled.²³⁰ There are obvious similarities between these two accounts of power seizures, both of which play down any mass support for Rebels among the plants' workers and stress production. But it is still apparent, despite the best efforts of the authors of official accounts, that there was considerable disruption to production during the power seizure stage of the January Revolution, and that some workers, 'hoodwinked' or not, did support Rebel resistance to the PLA when the military went into enterprises in March 1967 to help workers re-establish order in production and form alliances with revolutionary cadres.²³¹

227 See the accusations in *Nanfang Ribao* 24.2.67, in *SCMP* 3904, 4-5; and *Xiao Bing* 25.2.67, in *SCMM* 575, 21-6.

228 *Guangzhou Ribao* 2.4.67, in *SCMP* 3961, 13.

229 *Ibid.*, 14.

230 *Ibid.*, 15.

231 See *Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio*, 15.3.67, in *NPRS* 199, M4-9.

The provincial power seizure in Guangdong which occurred on January 22 1967 was a controversial one, carried out without any use of force by an alliance of only a few Rebel organizations, including many which were only liaison centres for organizations in other parts of China, and which was often accused of lacking any real mass involvement and including a few organizations of Rebel workers as mere window-dressing. This naturally made the Provincial Revolutionary Rebel Allied Committee (Shenggelian) an easy target for its Conservative critics, but even Rebel groups offered only qualified support. Dai Xiao'ai was of the opinion that

workers and peasants ... were added only to provide legitimacy in a period when the centre was stressing workers as the 'main force' for revolution and insisting that intellectuals unite with them.²³²

Shenggelian's power seizure was criticized by other Rebels not only for having been carried out without any mass mobilization, but also for adopting an arrogant and high-handed attitude toward the masses after power was seized:

The '16 Articles' pointed out: "It will be necessary to trust the masses, rely on them, and respect their pioneering spirit." Some leaders of [Shenggelian], however, do nothing of the sort. As soon as they have taken over a certain unit, they would rise high above the revolutionary masses of that unit, issue orders and tell the masses what to do ... They even say arrogantly: "We take orders from Chairman Mao, and you shall take orders from us." ... Comrades who go down to factories and rural villages must not act presumptuously and issue orders to everyone.²³³

232 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 157.

233 *Guangzhou Hongweibing* 14, 10.2.67, in *SCMP* 3929, 2, 6.

This sort of behaviour is of course precisely what Rebel workers had revolted against.

The controversy surrounding Shenggelian's power seizure even among the Rebels must have weakened the position of the Rebel faction in Guangzhou as a whole, including the position of Rebel workers who had seized power in their own enterprises, and this probably facilitated the March military crackdown in the city. Undoubtedly the attacks on the PLA and PSB were a major motive for the imposition of military rule, but the scale, force and direction of the mass movement of 'economism' and the January Revolution's industrial unrest and power seizures must also have played a part. It is significant that the first targets of the mass arrests in Guangzhou were 'organizations of non-student elements'²³⁴; according to Dai Xiao'ai, 'worker and professional groups within [Shenggelian] were consistently treated more severely than their student affiliates.'²³⁵ Workers' organizations which extended across different trades, industries, and districts were banned, and organizations of demobilized soldiers (many of whom were now workers) and those branded 'economist' were ordered to disband, showing where the real threat to the authorities from these weeks of mass political activity was thought to lie.²³⁶ The provisions for the disbanding of organizations which cut across the boundaries of different trades and those which united workers in a particular district hit Rebel workers' organizations particularly hard, as they relied on these connections for their strength, often being a minority in individual enterprises. 'Few were able to seize power in their own units; most joined citywide, provincewide, or nationwide

234 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 1, 1.6.77, 8.

235 Bennett and Montaperto, *Red Guard*, 166.

236 See *Hongqi* 4, 1.3.67, 20-25.

activities.'²³⁷ As we have just seen, groups of Rebel workers who did seize power in their own enterprises were easily defeated once the PLA moved in to support the 'genuine' left.

March-December 1967: Military control, factional struggle, revolutionary alliance

Central authorities called in the military to keep order in Guangdong from February 25 1967, and the Military Control Commission (MCC) was formally established in Guangzhou on March 15.²³⁸ Since January, the PLA had been told it could not stand on the sidelines of the Cultural Revolution, but must 'support the left'. However, it was left to the military themselves to make decisions as to which individuals and organizations were 'genuine proletarian leftists' and which counterrevolutionary, and as was noted above, they tended to favour Conservative workers' organizations over those of the Rebels. Rebel groups were thus in a very difficult position, especially as many had taken part in storming military establishments, when it became clear that it was the military who had the responsibility for restoring order and banning any groups which did not conform to the approved course of the movement. Further, it was announced on Guangzhou Radio that attitude towards the PLA was in itself one of the main criteria for distinguishing who belonged to the genuine left.²³⁹ Probably because of the involvement of some members in attacks on the PLA²⁴⁰, but also because of the size and nature of the group, the August 1 Combat Corps was the first Rebel organization to be banned as counterrevolutionary in

237 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 79.

238 Vogel, *Canton under communism*, 332.

239 *Guangzhou Radio*, 15.3.67, in *NPRS* 199, M6.

240 Vogel, *Canton under communism*, 332.

Guangzhou, on March 1. This organization, 100,000 strong at its peak and still claiming 40-50,000 members when it was banned, contained large numbers of workers, many of them demobilized soldiers²⁴¹, and as we have already noted, workers were one of the first groups targeted in the crackdown on the Rebels.

When an organization was classified as counterrevolutionary, not only would its leaders be arrested²⁴², but even ordinary members were subject to close supervision. Zi Chuan recalls that in Guangzhou,

In March 1967 the Cultural Revolution was at its last gasp under the butcher's knife of the military. Most of the original mass organizations collapsed, and those still in existence had to submit to strict supervision by the military.²⁴³

Later in the year when its supporters were campaigning for the full rehabilitation of the Corps, with the MCC very reluctant to grant this, the experiences of some ordinary members in the March suppression were revealed. In a Red Guard article, which characterized the military's action as 'sanguinary

241 One of the main accusations against it was that it contained and was run by former GMD officers, escapees from labour camps, people who had been purged in previous campaigns, and people of dubious class background. In fact there is some truth in these accusations (they are true of elements in many Rebel groups, for obvious reasons), but the Corps was itself aware of the problem and undertook a substantial reorganization and re-election of leaders in mid-February, after which its claims that the majority of its members were workers of fairly good class origin were substantially true. See Hai Feng, *Cultural Revolution in the Canton area*, 62.

242 Instructions on dealing with these groups are littered with phrases such as 'attack without mercy' and 'severe punishment for evil ringleaders'; see *Hongqi* 4, 1.3.67, 23-4.

243 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 1, 1.6.77, 8.

dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'²⁴⁴, the case of Liang X, demobilized in 1958 and a worker at the Guangzhou People's Automobile Company, was used as an example. Liang was arrested on the evidence of a rival Conservative organization in his workplace and detained for a month on charges of being a leader of the counterrevolutionary Corps. He protested his innocence of this and of any counterrevolutionary act, but although he was not dealt with as a counterrevolutionary himself, his release papers declared him to be 'an intermediate ring-leader' of the organization, and he was barred from any further involvement in Rebel activities in his unit. He was also forbidden to say anything about conditions in the detention centre where he had been held, a provision which was presumably intended to intimidate other Rebels in the unit who had not yet been arrested.²⁴⁵

This article also reveals that all members of banned organizations had to register with the municipal PSB, showing that they were indeed supervised closely. Another account of the suppression of the Corps later in the year alleges that in March, many more people were arrested than was admitted by the authorities, often without proper warrants, and that ordinary members and their families were subject to other penalties, too:

After the dissolution of August 1 Combat Corps, all members were forcibly ordered to surrender and register and to write self-examinations.... The homes of many were raided, and many were struggled against and severely beaten up. They and their wives and children were generally discriminated against and denounced. Some were fired, some were transferred to other posts, some had their wages reduced, and for some the welfare benefits to which

244 *Dongfanghong* 8, 11.7.67, in *SCMP* 4010, 4-8.

245 *Ibid.*, 8.

they were entitled were abolished. This caused some people to lose their jobs and their homes.²⁴⁶

These were of course exactly the sort of reprisals which had initially deterred many workers from participation in Rebel activities. Firing, transferring, docking pay and struggling against workers were familiar methods to those of them who had witnessed earlier campaigns in the 1950s, and we saw the same tactics used against workers in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution itself. But it seems that the momentum of the 'economism' movement and the January Revolution carried workers along into actions and organizations which they knew to carry serious risks. Paradoxically, their treatment during the March suppression may have contributed to the militancy of many Rebel workers and others later in the year and in the first half of 1968, as it confirmed the likely consequences if they ended up on the losing side in the struggle. A group which by its very nature - the 'had-it-bad' faction - had less to lose than others in the movement thus gained a further motive for its militancy and commitment to final victory.

Spring 1967 saw a number of developments in enterprises which were specifically designed to counteract the Cultural Revolution trends which most concerned the authorities, including the forcing from office of all cadres and disruption to production as power-seizures and counter-seizures progressed. Calls for discipline and the maintenance of production with PLA assistance were made directly to workers and staff in the form of the 'Letter from the CCP Centre to all revolutionary workers, staff, and cadres in industrial enterprises'²⁴⁷. This document stressed efficiency, economy, keeping to the eight-hour day, attention to quality, cooperation with the PLA, and proper application of Mao's

246 Gang Ba-Yi, 15.10.67, in SCMP 4099, 5-6.

247 Hongqi 5, 30.3.67, 3-4; also Xinhua News Agency, 18.3.67, in SCMP 3904, 8-9 (English version).

cadre policy (which stipulated that the vast majority of cadres were good or relatively good and that those who had made mistakes should be allowed to reform themselves and go back to work). Power-seizures continued, but only on the approved model, and given the attention to the Heilongjiang 'triple combination' (sanjieshe) in the press, no-one could be in any doubt as to what that was.²⁴⁸

The most important feature of the 'triple combination' was that it included 'revolutionary cadres' and military representatives as well as representatives of mass organizations. This of course meant that many cadres were immediately restored to their posts, and in Guangzhou it was said that even those who had 'serious problems' could continue their work under mass supervision.²⁴⁹ Clearly workers were under strict control in this phase of the movement in enterprises, with at least some cadres and technicians back at their posts and PLA representatives present, and equally clearly there was a strong emphasis on meeting production plans. Yet in some places changes were being made on the factory floor and new leadership bodies were being developed, and despite the tense and often threatening atmosphere in which this occurred and the obvious top-down control being exercised, when we look at the reforms made in some enterprises, we can see that some of them did, in theory at least, conform to many workers' preference for a bigger say in decision-making and a more equal relationship with cadres. While not forgetting the large numbers of workers in prison or under surveillance at this point, we should give some attention to the achievements claimed by the power-seizures on the 'three-way alliance' or 'triple combination' model.

We noted earlier that it is not entirely accurate to say

248 Hongqi 4, 1.3.67, 12-14, 'The basic experience of Heilongjiang's Red Rebels' struggle to seize power', is one of many accounts.

249 Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio, 28.2.67, in NPRS 197, M2.

that workers generally supported Mao's line in industry rather than that of Liu Shaoqi, since there were elements of both to which some or all workers objected. However, the resentment building up among workers over the years when the Seventy Articles were in force in industry centred to a large extent on the issues of rigid division of labour, unnecessarily complex and strict rules and regulations, and the exclusion of workers from decision-making. The larger questions of authority and the relationship between workers and their managers had now been ruled out of bounds, as 'ultra-democracy' and the overthrow of all authority was condemned, but progress could still be made on reversing some of the more unpopular trends in management systems from the Seventy Articles era, and this was likely to find support among workers.

In the course of 'triple alliance' power seizures in enterprises throughout the country, it was reported, 'the rebels and revolutionary cadres joined forces, took all power into their own hands, and promptly started to institute a new order of things in their factories'²⁵⁰ by tackling the bureaucratism which had long hampered the workers:

The handful of persons taking the capitalist road ... enforced an out-and-out bureaucratic system which stifled the initiative and ingenuity of the workers... some leading cadres sat in their offices like high-and-mighty bureaucrats. All they did was to issue orders, dream up plans and indulge in the formulation of rules and regulations. Division of labour was so rigidly applied that it became a barrier between cadres and workers, between the managing and producing section, and between one workshop and another.²⁵¹

250 Xinhua News Agency 21.2.67, in SCMP 3887, 29.

251 Ibid., 29.

These bureaucrats had been replaced by a new sort of administrator, described as 'pathbreakers in the Cultural Revolution and model workers in production', people with 'high political qualifications' who were elected by workers themselves to be their 'true servants':

They work among the workers. Planners go to the workers to discuss their ideas and the resulting plan fully tallies with actual conditions. And the managing departments are now beginning to serve, and not just to "control", the workshops... A worker expressed exactly the sentiments of his comrades when he said: "We are now the real masters of our plant. Chairman Mao has given us the right to run it and we must do it well."²⁵²

We saw in the 1950s that the existence of a system of elections does not guarantee that workers have anything like a free choice in selecting cadres, but at that time elections for administrative, as opposed to union, cadres were only experimented with briefly, so this reform of management does represent a step forward whatever the extent of the choice being offered to workers; more consultation on planning would have been appreciated by many workers as well.

Later in the year, more examples of the success of three-way alliances in promoting both revolution and production were publicized. One model recommended for emulation was that of the Guiyang Cotton Mill, where the plant's twenty-two administrative departments were abolished and replaced with four offices which led revolution and production, bringing about a reduction in the proportion of non-productive personnel and closer relations between workers and especially technical cadres, who now 'have ... gone to the shops to live,

252 Ibid., 29.

study and struggle together with the rank and file.'²⁵³ This was said to be 'a good beginning ... for eradicating the evil influence of the former capitalist, revisionist system of management.'²⁵⁴ But there were also signs that little might actually have changed in some enterprises despite all the rhetoric about putting politics in command and implementing the mass line, for the simple reason that although a 'handful' had been removed from their positions, it was stated that 'many revolutionary cadres have taken part in leadership work and a sound command system has been set up'²⁵⁵; in other words, much the same people were in charge in many cases and discipline was still being enforced.

However, these sorts of post-power seizure reforms cannot be dismissed entirely, as they represent attempts to move in the direction of mass management which were to be repeated, with varying degrees of success, in many enterprises during the Cultural Revolution, and which are closely concerned with some of workers' main grievances before and during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, these reforms were clearly prompted, at least in part, by a desire on the part of the authorities to control the mass movement by suppressing their most radical and vocal critics, and then offering limited concessions to others; this is very similar to the way in which the 1956-7 protests were brought to a halt, though it was rather less successful on this second occasion. That reforms had to be implemented at all shows the strength of feeling on issues of bureaucratism and control even among workers who were not active Rebels, or who had joined the Conservative faction, especially as these had just witnessed the suppression and in some cases the sacking and imprisonment of Rebel activists from their own enterprises.

253 *Beijing Review* 15, 7.4.67, in *SCMM* 573, 28.

254 *Ibid.*, 29.

255 *Ibid.*, 27.

Towards the end of January, reports of power seizures (seizing power back from Rebels, in some cases) began to appear in Guangzhou, concerning the Guangzhou Heavy Machinery Plant, the Guangzhou Railway Sub-bureau, and the Guangzhou Motor Vehicle Repair Plant.²⁵⁶ In all of these enterprises, the PLA were reported to have assisted genuine proletarian revolutionaries in forming alliances and restoring discipline and production. Like the account of events in the Auto Assembly and Repair Plant which we looked at earlier, the reports on how the workers and cadres of the Railway Bureau formed their alliance reveal something of what went on during the outbreak of economism and the original January Revolution power seizure.

As in other Rebel power seizures, the people involved 'launched attacks on all cadres'²⁵⁷ and seem to have caused disruption in rail traffic. They were also stated to have targeted 'Mao-study activists, CCP and CYL members, and "five-good" workers as "unrevolutionary" '²⁵⁸, terminology which shows that they were in conflict with the Conservative faction. It should be remembered that the Rebel faction rail workers outnumbered the Conservative Spring Thunder group five to one²⁵⁹, and even in these reports which condemn them there seems to be no way round the fact that the Rebels had mass support: it is admitted at one point that the first attempt at a counter-power seizure in the Railway Bureau failed because the Conservatives had not 'striven to rally the great majority

256 See *Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio* reports for details, in *NPRS* 200, M15, 18-22, and 201, M3-5, 7-10, 13-14, and 17-19.

257 *NPRS* 201, M13.

258 *Ibid.*, M4.

259 The Guangzhou Railway Workers' Headquarters, consisting mostly of unskilled workers or 'coolies', had around 50,000 members (see note 219), while the Conservative Spring Thunder group comprised 10,000 cadres, engineers and skilled workers (Hong Yung Lee, *Politics of the Cultural Revolution*, 133).

of the masses ... revolutionary organizations and revolutionary masses ... did not understand us, or even suspected us'.²⁶⁰ The Rebels even succeeded in 'inciting some of the masses who did not understand the real situation to storm the Control Centre, the nerve centre of railway communications, in a vain attempt to paralyse all traffic in the Sub-bureau.'²⁶¹ Students were credited with a role in combatting economism on the railways, as they reportedly filled in for workers missing from their posts, serving as ticket-collectors.²⁶² Students had been involved in this sort of strike-breaking activity on the Shanghai docks²⁶³ as well, and it cannot have contributed much to worker-student unity, at least as far as Rebel workers were concerned.

So the picture in enterprises and on the streets in the first half of 1967 was a mixed one as far as workers were concerned. Many of those who had joined the wave of 'economism' and seizing power, an unprecedented opportunity to seek redress for what they felt to be years of mistreatment at the hands of cadres, and which actually led to most cadres being pushed aside, soon found themselves suppressed and in some cases arrested. And just as workers were among the first to be arrested, there is evidence that they were also the last to be released. Certainly in Changsha, non-student Rebels served much longer terms than did students²⁶⁴, and this is a familiar phenomenon from other protest movements, including that of 1989. In Guangzhou, Rebel workers' organizations did not revive as quickly as those of students once the

260 Ibid., M9.

261 Ibid., M4.

262 Guangzhou Radio 6.4.63, in NPRS 202, M8.

263 Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers', 117.

264 Unger, 'Whither China?...', *Modern China* 17, 1, January 1991, 20.

suppression began to be lifted²⁶⁵, and were described in an unofficial newspaper as late as the end of August 1967 as having been recently restored and expanded.²⁶⁶

As we saw above, once the Rebels had been subdued, power seizures on the authorized model were carried out and seemed to result in some reforms of enterprise management which conformed to workers' demands. But many 'revolutionary cadres' also returned to their posts and the PLA was in factories to maintain order, so progress towards more freedom and participation in the enterprise must have been limited as far as workers were concerned. There were signs that the much-vaunted new order brought about in enterprises might not live up to expectations, as the new provisional power structures seemed to include large numbers of cadres, including members of the former leadership, despite the misgivings of workers who would have preferred more of their own representatives.²⁶⁷ Those workers' representatives who were chosen to serve on the new bodies tended to be veteran workers, Mao-study activists and five-good workers, representatives of the old establishment, in other words; and they were selected by 'repeated examination and discussion' among workers and staff, not by any form of election, still less the 'Paris Commune' type of election so strongly promoted a few months before.²⁶⁸

But the mass movement could not be brought back under strict central control that easily: once the spring Trade Fair was over in Guangzhou, Zhou Enlai visited the city and praised the Rebel Red Flag faction while criticizing the Conservatives, thus giving the Rebels new scope for action.

265 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 69.

266 Hongse Baodong 22.8.67, in *SCMP* 4026, 7.

267 See for example *Renmin Ribao* 8.5.67, 3.

268 *Ibid.*, 3.

Central documents now asserted that groups should not be stigmatized as counterrevolutionary, that their basic orientation had always been correct, and that the army should 'cherish the people', rather than suppressing them.²⁶⁹ It had been evident all along that Guangzhou was not entirely peaceful, as there were repeated warnings that some people were 'spreading rumours' to split the PLA and the masses²⁷⁰ and still attempting to disrupt production. In fact, during April and May Guangzhou Rebels were making plans and reconnoitring the prisons and PSB stations where their comrades were being held with a view to storming them if the MCC would not release all its prisoners; this could be what is meant by continuing attacks on and rumours about the PLA.²⁷¹

Praise for workers' success in forming alliances was premature, as well, since large-scale, armed and extremely violent factional struggle was to break out over the summer, involving the revived and expanded Rebel workers' organizations and the Conservative groups from large enterprises in some parts of the city.²⁷² Despite editorials in the autumn insisting that there was no reason for workers to split into two antagonistic factions²⁷³, progress in forming revolutionary alliances and revolutionary committees in Guangzhou's enterprises was slow, dragging on from October 1967 until late January the following year, and around the end of 1967 and early in 1968 there were further outbreaks of unrest involving contract and temporary workers, as well as other instances of renewed 'economism' in some places, including the Guangzhou Railway Sub-bureau where the problem

269 See Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 69.

270 See for example *Guangzhou/Guangdong Radio* 6.3.67, in *NPRS* 197, M22.

271 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 1, 1.6.77, 8-10

272 *Hongse Baodong* 22.8.67, in *SCMP* 4026, 7.

273 *Renmin Ribao* 14.9.67, in *SCMP* 4024, 28.

was claimed to have been settled back in March 1967.²⁷⁴ What was even more surprising was that the Sub-bureau had been put under military control in November 1967, yet unrest persisted.²⁷⁵

The obvious difficulties experienced in trying to persuade, coax, and threaten workers into forming alliances were rooted in the unresolved issues of this and previous confrontations with workers. Rebel workers were still adamantly opposed to the 'liberation' and return to work of large numbers of deposed cadres, and to the powerful role of the PLA representatives in the new power structures, the Revolutionary Committees. Concern about continued attacks on cadres prompted the usual measures to remove antagonism on the factory floor, with leading cadres being urged to go down to the masses, spend at least a third of their time there, and display a democratic workstyle, treating others as their equals.²⁷⁶ These exhortations, if heeded, might have won a favourable response from workers back in the mid-1950s, but now, after eighteen months of the Cultural Revolution, things had gone much too far for gestures like these to have any real effect. Workers were not now asking cadres to mend their ways and show workers more respect; they had already overthrown many of the cadres once, completely rejecting their authority, and had tried, for a brief period, to establish themselves as the true 'masters of the enterprise'. The insistence of the central authorities on the reinstatement of most cadres was bitterly resented by Rebels after this. It had also become apparent to most Rebels by now that

274 See *Guangtie Zongsi* 28, early February 1968, in *SCMP* 4129, 1-4, 4-6. Unrest among contract and temporary workers was also reported in Sichuan and Shanghai (*Current Scene* 6, 5, 23).

275 *Chunlei Zhanshi* 19, 25.11.67, 'Warmly hail the imposition of military control on Canton Railway Sub-bureau', in *SCMP* 4120, 5-6. See also other related articles in this issue.

276 See for example *Guangzhou Radio* 19-22.10.67, in *NPRS* 230, M1-9; *Guangzhou Radio* 21-22.11.67, in *NPRS* 235, M1-7.

all their actions had to fall into some sort of orbit known only to those at the top, or else. Those who were not reconciled to playing this role became angry. They started to shout the slogan: "We want a genuine mass movement, not a manipulation of the mass movement!"²⁷⁷

This was of course a dangerous development from the point of view of the top leadership, and was one more motive for turning to the only institution Party leaders could still rely on, the PLA, for the suppression, by force wherever necessary, of those forces which were refusing to submit to the 'restoration of the old' in enterprises and elsewhere.

1968: The fall of the Rebels and the rise of 'workers' dictatorship'

The problems of persistent factionalism and attacks on cadres in Guangzhou were blamed in part on the re-emergence of the 'ultra-left trend'²⁷⁸ there, and there is some truth in this accusation. Left ideas grew in popularity among some of the Rebels during the last months of 1967 and the first half of 1968, and the influence of the extreme left 'trend' on Guangzhou's workers led to calls on provincial radio in June 1968 for the smashing of 'illegal solidarities between groups of workers and the Trend'²⁷⁹. During March 1968 Shengwulian's manifesto, *Whither China?*, was circulating in Guangzhou, with its attack on the exploiting 'red capitalist' cadre class and its call not to 'go down the bourgeois

277 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 115.

278 As in Huang Yongsheng's 12.12.67 report on the overall situation in Guangzhou, *Guangzhou Radio* 14.12.67, in *NPRS* 235, M4.

279 *Guangdong Radio* 7.6.68, quoted in *China News Analysis*, 769, 3.

reformist road of the Revolutionary Committees'.²⁸⁰ The leftist 'trend' brought forth 'Guangdong's Shengwulian', in the form of the so-called '85 thought trend' (named after the unofficial publication in which its writings appeared) which posed the question 'Whither Guangdong?',²⁸¹ Echoing the analysis of Shengwulian's Yang Xiguang, a member of the '85' faction stated at a meeting that 'the present contradiction is between the basic level of the labouring people, the rusticated youth, and contract and temporary workers who have suffered the most deeply, and those who have climbed up onto the workers' throne.'²⁸² This formulation clearly relates the idea of the existence of a new bureaucratic class exploiting workers and peasants to the conflict we saw in 1966 and early 1967 between the more disadvantaged workers and enterprise and Party authorities, showing the relevance of workers' protests to perhaps the most important issue of the Cultural Revolution.

The danger of the idea that cadres constituted a new exploiting class in enterprises seems to have been taken seriously at the centre, as an April 1968 *Renmin Ribao* article on Revolutionary Committees in enterprises specifically denied that cadres' political power was that of an exploiting class.²⁸³ Cadres, however, were warned that the proletarian nature of their political power depended on maintaining close ties with the workers, becoming 'common people serving as officials', and guarding against bureaucratism, arrogance and oppressive behaviour.²⁸⁴ Later in the year, as Rebel attacks on the Revolutionary Committees' 'rightist reversal of verdicts' (i.e. the inclusion of cadres overthrown by Rebels)

280 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 2, 1.7.77, 46.

281 Ibid., 46.

282 Hai Feng, *Cultural Revolution in the Canton area*, 330.

283 *Renmin Ribao* 3.4.68, in *SCMP* 4161, 8.

284 Ibid., 8.

gathered momentum, further attempts were made to emphasize that the Revolutionary Committee was uniquely well-suited to the mass line and anti-bureaucratism, and that representatives were ordinary labourers with no special privileges; it was even claimed that criticism of the Revolutionary Committees by some Rebels was proof of the democratic atmosphere.²⁸⁵

The stress on the Revolutionary Committees' status as a 'red political power' won by workers' own efforts during the Cultural Revolution made criticism of the institution problematic, but Rebel workers' groups in Guangzhou were very clear in their condemnation of the way in which the old power-holders had taken over the new institutions in enterprises, and the fact that both they and the Conservatives had effectively shut Rebel workers (and cadres) out of the new organs of power, including not just the Revolutionary Committee, but also the Workers' Disciplinary Teams which were organized in the spring and summer of 1968 to carry out the 'cleansing of class ranks'.²⁸⁶

When revolutionary committees were established in various factories, the rebels ... suffered from discrimination of all sorts. For instance, in the Canton Iron and Steel Works and other plants, some rebel group leaders ... were accused of having "strong factionalist character" or of being "extreme leftists" and were prevented from joining the "three-way combination" organs. When a revolutionary committee was set up in the Canton Oil Refinery, all representatives of the rebel group were excluded from it.²⁸⁷

285 Xinhua News Agency 30.6.68, in SCMP 4212, 11-16.

286 See 'The present state of the movement in some factories in Canton - An investigation report', Guangzhou Gongren 34, 28.5.68, in SCMP 4208, 9.

287 Ibid., 9.

It was a similar story with the Workers' Disciplinary Corps, where Rebel workers were excluded almost entirely from the organizations, and particularly from their leadership; those who did join were reportedly harassed by Conservative faction members who made up the bulk of the force.²⁸⁸ Rebels also complained that

Apart from being subject to political attack and discrimination, many rebel fighters also suffered from economic persecution. In the Canton Paper Mill and Canton Shipbuilding Yard cases continued to appear where the wages of workers of rebel groups were unreasonably reduced and hardship subsidies unreasonably abolished, and so on.²⁸⁹

Cadres who had sided with the Rebels were also said to have been discriminated against and excluded from the new organs of power, while in contrast there were many cases where 'cadres who have made serious mistakes have one after another been placed on 'revolutionary committees' without their problem of "alignment" being solved.'²⁹⁰

But what most concerned Rebel workers in Guangzhou early in the summer of 1968 was what they termed the 'return to the old'. It seemed to many of them that all the effort and upheaval of the past two years had changed very little in many units. Shengwulian insisted that the Cultural Revolution was not about the dismissal of individual power-holders, but the overthrow of the entire structure of authority in enterprises and in society; but now it seemed that not only had this sort of revolution not succeeded, but the Rebels had even failed permanently to dislodge the individuals in the old system. The Guangzhou workers were driven to conclude that

288 Ibid., 9.

289 Ibid., 9.

290 Ibid., 14.

the same group of men are still in actual power, while mass representatives are merely the appendages... in Canton at present, both in those units where revolutionary committees have been set up and in those units where [they] have not, not only do the same group of men remain in power, but the same working systems remain intact also.²⁹¹

In the examples given by the Rebel workers, the old Party committees and the political and militia departments still seemed to be operating within the framework of the 'new red political power', and it was said that 'some people in these departments are even now collecting black material against the masses', and in some cases had made preparations for the arrest of Rebel leaders in their enterprises.²⁹²

At the end of 1966 and the beginning of 1967, workers had taken advantage of the unprecedented opportunity presented to them by the lifting of Party controls on organizations and the legitimizing of attacks on Party and administrative cadres, to press for a solution to all the grievances which had been building up among them over the years, the most fundamental of which - the question of power or authority and who really was the master of the enterprise - can be traced back to both of the previous confrontation between workers and the Party-state. In the circumstances of the Cultural Revolution, workers took their growing conviction that cadres were not simply allotted a different sort of work under the rational division of labour, but were actually a privileged and exploitative stratum or new class, to its logical conclusion and, briefly, attempted to take over enterprises themselves. Both this and the more obviously 'economistic' aspects of the mass movement proved equally unacceptable to the central authorities, and the movement was soon brought back onto its

291 Ibid., 15.

292 Ibid., 13.

proper course. The subsequent struggles of the Rebels, bitter and hard-fought as they were, never aimed at or looked likely to achieve any radical changes in how enterprises were run or who held power in them, and by mid-1968 they were battling just to avoid total obliteration.

The report quoted above was intended to be the first part of a longer document, but there turned out to be no time for Rebel workers to prepare it. The final suppression of the Rebels began in the summer of 1968, and on July 15 the headquarters of Gonggelian, the Rebel workers' federation which prepared the report, was the target of the military's 'mopping-up' operations; four people were killed as troops fought their way up through the building from floor to floor.²⁹³ 'The Cultural Revolution came to an abrupt, shocking end'²⁹⁴ as the new revolutionary order was enforced and the campaign to 'cleanse class ranks' of proven counterrevolutionaries began.

It seems paradoxical that at precisely this moment when the final crackdown on Rebel workers occurred, workers seemed finally to have come to the forefront of the Cultural Revolution with the despatch of Workers' Propaganda Teams into schools and universities and all units in the 'superstructure' to exercise 'all-round working class leadership'. But it should be remembered that

only workers with "high political qualifications" were recruited into the propaganda teams. In places like Guangzhou, where typical "conservatives" had crushed typical "rebels", *large numbers of workers were not only deprived of the honour of exercising "overall leadership", but were victims of the "clean*

293 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 2, 1.7.77, 48.

294 Liu Guokai, *Brief analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, 118.

out" movement.²⁹⁵

The new direction of the movement in enterprises acknowledged that cadres had in some cases become an exploiting, privileged stratum usurping the product of workers' labour, and thus that the relations between workers and cadres had degenerated from those between leaders and led to those between exploiters and exploited.²⁹⁶ This was the result of the bourgeois revisionism of Liu Shaoqi and his agents who had imposed 'profit in command' and material incentives, and had caused enterprise administration to become top-heavy, resulting in a split between the Party and the people, the proletarian state and the masses.²⁹⁷ The solution to this was the mass line, closer ties with workers and rejection of privileges, 'crack troops and simpler administration', i.e. retrenchment of administrative staff, and the revolutionary committee.²⁹⁸ This formulation clearly represents a victory of the Maoist line in industry over that associated with Liu and Deng, but of course this did not necessarily represent a victory for any group of workers, and certainly not for the Rebels who were being suppressed.

These sorts of policies in industry, the Maoist line of politics in command and reliance on the masses to get rid of irrational regulations and systems, so-called mass management, persisted not just through what was left of the Cultural Revolution, but, on paper at least, on into the 1970s; they were the subject of a particularly fierce debate between the Gang of Four and Deng Xiaoping and their respective followers in 1975-6. In fact, when the lasting influence of the Cultural Revolution in industry is discussed, it is usually

295 Ibid., 126-7.

296 Renmin Ribao 9.7.68, 4.

297 Renmin Ribao 13.7.68, 1.

298 Ibid., 1.

this policy line which is meant, rather than workers' earlier experiences in self-organization, 'economism', and seizing power.²⁹⁹ In this respect it is particularly important to distinguish between the three years of the Cultural Revolution proper and the years of Gang of Four rule from late 1969 to 1976. The former period is the one which many workers saw as the high point of democratization and freedom of expression and organization in enterprises and in wider society, but in the latter seven or eight years, ubiquitous praise for the superiority of the working class and its leading role in society and politics was not matched by the reality of workers' position and influence, and workers seem to have been subject to the same sort of autocratic rule as the rest of Chinese society; indeed, workers were often prominent among those protesting against this type of rule.

Given that the Maoist line in industrial organization held sway in theory at least throughout the first half of the 1970s, in order to evaluate how far these policies actually went in establishing the sort of enterprise management system for which workers had always lobbied, namely one in which their theoretical status as masters had some basis in reality, we should consider the whole of the 1968-76 period, looking not only at what reforms were made, how extensively, and how long they lasted, but also at any signs of renewed protest among workers which would indicate dissatisfaction.

After the Cultural Revolution

At the First Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, Mao said

299 The ten-year Cultural Revolution model of course accommodates the whole of this policy's period of implementation, but it understates the importance of the earlier, mass activity of workers, as was explained in the note on Cultural Revolution periodization above.

It seemed there was no alternative but to make the great Cultural Revolution, because this foundation of ours was not sound enough. According to my observations, still in a considerable number of enterprises, if not all or a majority of them, leadership was not in the hands of genuine Marxists and the masses of workers.³⁰⁰

From this time on, there was a strong emphasis on reliance on the workers in managing socialist enterprises, and the Anshan Constitution was once again promoted as the guiding set of principles for all management work.³⁰¹ This would imply an extension of workers' participation in management, and indeed some researchers found this to be the case, describing institutions such as the workers' management team as 'attempts to develop organizational structures affording the greatest possibilities for the masses to participate in running the factories and to make their weight felt.'³⁰² Bettelheim went even further, suggesting that Chinese enterprises were seeing a transition to 'management by the majority, or mass management.'³⁰³

But most of those who have examined the practice of participation in management and all the issues surrounding workers' achievement of their proper position in the socialist enterprise have concluded that 'the degree of change and its permanence was greatly overstated'³⁰⁴ by Bettelheim.

300 P N Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 111.

301 See for example *Guangming Ribao* 21.3.70, in *SCMP* 4627, 78-88.

302 Bettelheim, *The Cultural Revolution and industrial organization in China*, 43.

303 *Ibid.*, 70.

304 Lockett, *The Cultural Revolution and industrial organization in a Chinese enterprise: The Beijing General Knitwear Mill, 1966-81*, 5.

The more radical and egalitarian demands for fundamental changes in the prevailing system of industrial organization, issuing from sections of the working class movement and voiced by some of the more radical leaders in Beijing, were denounced as "ultra-leftist" well before the Cultural Revolution had run its tragic course.³⁰⁵

In the case of the revolutionary committee, its potential was not realized as

the appearance of control from below through election was not institutionalized through re-election procedures, and there is no evidence to suggest that there was any form of re-election.³⁰⁶

As we saw with the workers' congress and unions in 1956-7, this lack of provision for regular re-election of representatives was often fatal in undermining participatory institutions. As for workers' management teams,

from 1973 they were put under the control of the reformed trade union and by 1975 certainly such bodies neither existed on the scale suggested by Bettelheim nor did they have the autonomy from management and Party structures.³⁰⁷

Measures for workers' participation in management and in technical innovation do not seem to have lived up to claims that they represented a revolution in industrial organization

305 Meisner, 'Marx, Mao and Deng on the division of labor in history', Dirlik and Meisner (eds.) *Marxism and the Chinese experience*, 104.

306 Lockett, *Cultural Revolution and industrial organization in a Chinese enterprise*, 15.

307 Ibid., 18.

and management, being

at best reformist in character ... Most were gradually abandoned in the early 1970s in favor of pre-Cultural Revolution forms of managerial authority, factory work rules, and labour discipline.³⁰⁸

And the results of the other 'participation', that of cadres and technicians in labour, were similarly disappointing. This sort of participation had been going on in one form or another for nearly twenty years, but there still was little sign that it was having the effect desired by the workers who had initially called for it. Cadres' participation in manual labour 'perhaps had a certain symbolic significance, but [its] effects on the consciousness of those involved were problematic in the short term and negligible over the long term',³⁰⁹.

The 'liberation' and reinstatement of former cadres after the 'cleansing of class ranks' which ended the Cultural Revolution seemed to have the sort of effect Rebel workers had feared when they opposed the policy back in 1967-8, as it 'gradually eroded much of the impact of the Cultural Revolution.'³¹⁰ In at least one enterprise, this was what happened:

As former cadres were "liberated", they were placed on the revolutionary committee where their numbers, skill and experience came to outweigh the mass representatives. As the unit resumed its normal activities, and political matters increasingly gave

308 Meisner, 'Marx, Mao and Deng on the division of labor', 104.

309 Ibid., 104.

310 Blecher and White, *Micropolitics*, 111.

way to administrative and professional tasks, moreover, the revolutionary committee as a whole lost power to its standing committee, and the mass representatives on the standing committee became less influential. Their opinions were increasingly ignored, and they spoke less and less often.³¹¹

This is an almost verbatim repetition of the description of the fate of workers' representatives on the very first participatory organ set up after liberation, the WRC, which we noted in the first section of this study. It seems particularly ironic in view of all the praise of the Anshan Constitution and corresponding vilification of the Seventy Articles during the early 70s, that 'the basic orientation, and, in some cases, the specific provisions of the 'Seventy Articles' had outlived their opponents',³¹² after the Cultural Revolution.

But if 'the structure of the industrial establishment, together with its vested interests, suffered little discontinuity and disturbance from the early 1960s to the period right after the Cultural Revolution',³¹³ we cannot say that the Cultural Revolution had no lasting impact in industry or on workers' lives and ideas. The Cultural Revolution did give workers 'a limited say in some areas from which they had been excluded ... led to the airing of many critical ideas', and also played a part in 'reducing managerial control in areas such as labour discipline.'³¹⁴ Indeed, complaints about lax discipline and anarchism in enterprises in the late

311 Ibid., 111.

312 P N Lee, *Industrial organization and enterprise management*, 93.

313 P N Lee, 'The Gang of Four', 87.

314 Lockett, 'Enterprise management - Moves towards democracy?', in Feuchtwang and Hussain (ed.) *The Chinese economic reforms*, 229-230.

1970s invariably cite the Cultural Revolution, as well as the influence of the Gang of Four, as its major cause. The experiences of the Cultural Revolution led to a crisis of managerial legitimacy³¹⁵, and to a certain extent of the legitimacy of all authority, especially among younger workers. Workers who had overthrown or forced aside the leaders of their enterprises in the January Revolution still resented the way in which these cadres had in most cases been reinstated with military backing, and the legacy of bitter factional conflict must have poisoned the atmosphere in many units long after the end of the Cultural Revolution proper.

We saw earlier how eagerly workers adopted the slogan of 'everyone liberating themselves' to justify their self-organization in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, but this phrase also crops up later in a rather different context, being used by workers to resist the reimposition of discipline by enterprise authorities and the military.³¹⁶ This raises the possibility that the radical rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution and the early 1970s which celebrated the ideological superiority of the worker also had some lasting effect, since it could be used by workers themselves in unintended ways. Leaders seem to have given hostages to fortune in the shape of slogans which, however far removed from the reality of workers' subordination to Party-state authorities, were difficult to counter even when used by discontented workers in cynical and entirely negative ways, e.g. to justify absenteeism or slow working.

The Gang of Four's criticism of regulations and systems designed for 'control, check and suppression' of workers were particularly vulnerable to this sort of treatment, since workers had ample ideological justification for objecting to almost any control over their working lives as 'an insult to

315 Ibid., 230.

316 See *China News Analysis* 711, 3.

their revolutionary spontaneity' and an encroachment on their right to 'liberate themselves'. The eulogizing of workers' role as masters in the enterprise does seem to have given them a weapon with which they could resist an overt return to pre-1966 management methods, although this resistance was on the whole unsuccessful; of course, its other main effect was to breed resentment against the Gang of Four, who had proved either unwilling or unable to realize their much-vaunted revolution in industrial management and organization. It is interesting to note that just as the pro-working class rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution and early 1970s may have been of use to workers in asserting themselves politically, the reforms of the 1980s disadvantaged them in that terms such as 'the masses' or 'the working class is the most progressive class' were largely lost to them and to their advocates³¹⁷. However, in the 1989 protests, while well aware of the dishonesty of claims that workers were the 'leading class' in China, workers did attempt to use their widely proclaimed status as the 'most advanced class' to take what they felt to be their rightful place in the movement when this was resisted by student activists, and were certainly not defensive in their use of classic pro-working class terminology.

As to signs of dissatisfaction among workers, they are apparent in the first half of the 1970s. Many were directly related to material conditions, such as the fact that until 1973 many workers had not had a single wage increase in nearly ten years (except, of course, the increases they demanded, and briefly received, during the 'economist' upsurge). Various cities saw serious industrial unrest in the years 1974-6, and in Hangzhou in 1975, one of the better-known incidents, the army had to intervene to bring strikes to an end.³¹⁸ Workers

317 Chan, 'Revolution of Corporatism?', 50.

318 See Forster, *Rebellion and factionalism in a Chinese province*, 275, and 'The 1976 Ch'ing-ming incident in Hangchow', *Issues and Studies* 22, 2, 4-86, 17-18; Lotta, *And Mao makes five: Mao Zedong's last great battle*, 31.

on the Shanghai docks also protested in 1974 that

[t]he leadership of our district always talks about relying on the masses, but the masses are forgotten when work is carried out. Herein lies the cause of not much change in our district over the past few years. The leadership has looked upon the workers not as the masters of the wharf but as the slaves of tonnage.³¹⁹

This last case indicates that workers' grievances were not purely economic, but also encompassed disappointment over the lack of real progress during and after the Cultural Revolution, and a new unwillingness to endure an unsatisfactory situation, with the resort to self-organization and independent action coming much more quickly in the wake of the Cultural Revolution than it ever did before.

[T]he Cultural Revolution broke open the gates of thought of China's youth, and they can't be blocked up again ... Although everyone's path of thought wasn't the same [after the Cultural Revolution], yet the Earth was no longer asleep, "the people wouldn't be so badly fooled again", and the occurrence of the Tian'anmen Incident and the Li Yizhe dazibao are clear proof of this.³²⁰

Guangzhou in the summer and autumn of 1974 was 'seething with urban protest'³²¹, much of it strongly reminiscent of Rebel protests during the Cultural Revolution. The Baiyun Mountain Incident was the culmination of these events:

319 Wylie, 'Shanghai dockers', 123.

320 Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 3, 1.8.77, 34.

321 Chan, Rosen and Unger (eds.) *On socialist democracy and the Chinese legal system: The Li Yizhe debates*, 8.

A crowd of more than a hundred thousand, mainly factory workers and youth who had been sent to settle in the countryside, climbed Baiyun mountain ostensibly to honour their ancestors according to the traditions of the Mid-autumn festival. But many of them used the occasion to protest against cadre privileges and other inequities ... ³²²

The celebrated Li Yizhe big-character poster, too, was concerned with some of the main themes of Cultural Revolution protests, namely the existence of a new bureaucratic ruling class or 'new nobility', and the inability of ordinary people to exercise their theoretical democratic rights and to participate in politics.³²³ It is clear from all these events that the concerns and ideas of young workers in particular were not that different in 1974 from what we saw in 1967-8, which in itself suggests that the major underlying problems as far as less privileged workers were concerned had not been solved, and were still the subject of large-scale protest.

The above two protests, the Tian'anmen Incident and the Li Yizhe poster, were of course aimed at the Party leadership of the time, the Gang of Four, and at what ordinary people perceived as its autocratic and arbitrary style of rule. It is often said that workers, in their involvement in this sort of protest and in the workplace generally, rejected the Maoist line in industry which they experienced during the early 1970s, and welcomed the return of Deng Xiaoping and his economic reforms. There is some truth in this; but we should be clear about what exactly it was that workers wanted, and what they therefore rejected. The austerity which stemmed

322 Ibid, 8-9. See also Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 7, 1.12.77, 23. Zi states that demobilized soldiers protesting over wages were also involved in this incident.

323 A translation of the poster can be found in Chan, Rosen and Unger's *On socialist democracy*, 32-85.

from the Gang's rejection of material incentives was undoubtedly unpopular, but as we noted above, another factor in workers' dissatisfaction was their disappointment that reforms in the direction of a greater role in running their own enterprises had failed to live up to expectations; those reforms which had been made had not lasted, and workers were faced with a very similar structure of industrial organization to that which they had experienced before the Cultural Revolution. We have seen that workers generally react to the discrepancy between rhetoric about participation and their position as masters and the reality of subjugation to management with discontent and eventually protest, and the Gang of Four were not immune to this process. As we noted above, their very emphasis on workers' right to run their own enterprises must have damaged them when it did not materialize in practice.

In all of these considerations it must be borne in mind that workers were divided, and that they did not, in fact, adhere to either Mao's or Deng's line in its entirety. There is a clear discrepancy between the concerns of the Maoists and later the Gang of Four, and those of workers: for example, the former gave much attention to criticizing the pre-1966 official trade unions which were swept aside in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, but most workers did not bother to condemn them. They had no need to; they had virtually ignored the unions since they were found so inadequate as a vehicle for representation and protest in 1956-7, and in the Cultural Revolution workers simply organized themselves, as they had before, but on a larger scale. As for the reforms of enterprise management proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1975, these involved a marked move away from workers' participation in management³²⁴, and whatever the realities of the much-vaunted Maoist participatory forms, this would not have been popular, especially among former Rebels.

324 P N Lee, 'The Gang of Four', 91.

And if workers had been so much in favour of Deng's reforms, it is difficult to see why they also became involved in the Democracy Wall movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and why the period was marked by industrial unrest which included the formation of independent unions, some of them bearing the name of 'Solidarity'. Indeed, industrial unrest seems to have so hampered the reforms that Deng found it necessary to remove the right to strike from the Constitution in 1982.

One of the major problems of the ten-year periodization of the Cultural Revolution, as Anita Chan has pointed out, is that the Rebel faction tends to be lumped together with the Gang of Four and their supporters as 'ultra-leftists'³²⁵; this has the effect of discrediting former Rebels (this is actually one of its purposes) and confusing the picture with regard to workers' allegiances during the Cultural Revolution and the early 1970s. Briefly, the Dengist version of events identifies the Rebels, who in this formulation had little support among workers, with followers of the Gang of Four, and insists that the Gang was actually able to place its people in positions of power in enterprises and implement its reforms over the 'Cultural Revolution decade'. These policies were then rejected by workers who rose up against the Gang at the end of the decade, most notably in the Tian'anmen Incident (which was reclassified from counterrevolutionary to revolutionary after the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping in 1978), and workers supported the Dengist reforms in industry.

In fact, as we have seen, many workers did join the Rebel faction, and the significance of their actions cannot be measured solely in terms of the numbers actively involved. Even before the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1969, many former cadres had returned to their positions of power in the new enterprise management structures, and this process accelerated afterwards. The Gang of Four's actual

325 Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions', 72.

achievements did not match their words with regard to 'mass management' of enterprises by workers themselves, and such limited progress as was made did not last long. Workers, including many former Rebels, did indeed revolt against the Gang's rule in the mid-1970s, but this seems to have had more to do with the failure of the Gang to establish workers as the true masters of the enterprise than with any reaction to the excesses of such policies. Attempts by the Gang to manipulate workers through the recently reformed trade unions³²⁶ may also have antagonized workers, who of course now had experience of forming their own independent organizations on a large scale, and so were even less inclined than before to waste their time on official unions. Industrial unrest during 1975 and 1976 was blamed on the influence of the Gang of Four's 'anarchism', but in at least some cases it represented a 'protest against the imposition of pre-1966 rules and regulations'³²⁷, and therefore was aimed at Deng Xiaoping's 'Twenty Articles'³²⁸, the successor to the Seventy Articles, showing that claims of unconditional support for the reforms among workers are wide of the mark.

Once we have separated the momentous events of the three-year Cultural Revolution from the period of rule by the Gang of Four which followed it, a more accurate picture of events surrounding the Tian'anmen Incident can be pieced together and, in particular, the actions of workers can be placed in the context of their original aspirations in the Cultural Revolution.

326 *Renmin Ribao* 8.4.77, 5; *Xinhua News Agency* 21.4.77, in *SCMP* 6332, 131-3; Kraus, *Class conflict in Chinese socialism*, 160.

327 Lotta, *And Mao makes five*, 49.

328 The 'Twenty Articles', entitled 'Some questions on accelerating the development of industry', are translated in *Selections from People's Republic of China Magazines (SPRCM)* 926 (1977), 8-30.

[T]he rank and file members of the Rebel faction had no connection with the Gang of Four or its clique.... the actual unstated crimes of the Rebels were that they had attacked the Dengists and Party bureaucrats, and that at the end of the Cultural Revolution (1968-69) they had dared come out with a new paradigm of society that called into question the legitimacy of the ruling class.³²⁹

In 1976 it was still this question of the new ruling class which preoccupied protestors in Tian'anmen Square and elsewhere in China. Although it is not untrue to say that popular anger was directed against the Gang of Four (it undoubtedly was), this does not mean that the rest of the Party-state leadership was immune to criticism, and it certainly does not mean that workers or any other section of society were supporting one leadership faction against another. In fact both the Cultural Revolution Rebels and the demonstrators of April 5 'were all fighting against the autocracy of the privileged bureaucratic class.'³³⁰

In an unofficial forum of democracy activists in Guangzhou to mark the third anniversary of the Tian'anmen Incident, Wang Xizhe of the Li Yizhe group pointed to the dominance of young workers in the movement as a sign that the working class was now ready to take over the direct administration of society while the Party retreated from this role to one of ideological guidance, in line with the classic Marxist idea of the withering away of the state. In future, he considered that

[t]he system of economic management, "workers'

329 Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions', 73.

330 Xiao Ping, 'The rise and decline of China's democracy movement', originally published in the underground journal *Yecao* (Weeds) in 1983, translated in *Issues and Studies* 22, 1, 1.86, 173.

participation in management" (in the realm of politics, "workers' participation in dictatorship") according to the formula of the "Anshan Constitution" must be changed into "direct democratic management by the workers". The class dictatorship of the proletariat can have its firm material foundation only under conditions in which the workers manage the means of production themselves directly and democratically. This was the aim of the Paris Commune³³¹.

These references to the Paris Commune and to the need for workers now to take direct control of their own enterprises show clearly that the ideals of the Cultural Revolution Rebels, particularly as expressed in Shengwulian's *Whither China?* tract, with its celebration of the January Revolution takeover by workers of their workplaces, were not only still alive, but were to have considerable influence in the next major outbreak of protest and dissent involving workers, the Democracy Wall movement. We will also come across another of Wang Xizhe's convictions, the idea that 'the motive force for change "has always come from the lower strata ..."³³², when we see how pressures from below in the form of the democracy movement and the industrial unrest which accompanied it compelled the post-Mao leadership to introduce democratizing reforms in enterprises similar to those implemented in the much earlier confrontation with workers of the mid-1950s.

With the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution and the years which followed we return to the basic themes of all the confrontations between workers and the Party-state in China thus far: the question of who holds power in the enterprise

331 Wang Xizhe, 'Strive for the class dictatorship of the proletariat', translated by Stanley Rosen and Ai Ping in Chan, Rosen and Unger (eds.) *On socialist democracy and the Chinese legal system: The Li Yizhe debates*, 155-6.

332 Chan, Rosen and Unger, *On socialist democracy*, 19.

and how it is exercised, and of whether or not the workers are truly masters in their own enterprise. An important part of this is the issue of how workers are to be represented in the workplace and beyond, and how far they will be allowed to represent and defend their own interests and priorities. It is here that the major impact of the Cultural Revolution can be found, for it saw the first post-liberation instance of large-scale autonomous organization and political action by workers, and this experience had a profound effect on workers' later conduct and protests. The Cultural Revolution also highlighted the idea of the existence of a new exploiting class in China in the shape of the industrial and Party bureaucracy, and this idea came to be accepted by many workers during the course of the movement, even if it was not fully articulated at the point in 1966-7 when the momentum of the mass movement pushed Rebel workers into a wholesale attack on all cadres. It is an idea which we will certainly find to be important in the next section when we look at the Democracy Wall movement and the problems of re-establishing both discipline and legitimacy in enterprises, and it also played a major role, though 'devoid of radical rhetoric'³³³ in many cases, in the pro-democracy protests of 1989. The spark for the next crisis in workers' relations with Party-state authorities was in many cases a familiar one - disputes over methods of participation, the role of the official unions, cadre attitudes and workstyle - but workers' responses, i.e. autonomous industrial and other protest action, clearly bore the marks of the Cultural Revolution, and debates over these longstanding bones of contention would never be quite the same again because of it.

333 Unger, 'Whither China?...', *Modern China* 17, 1, January 1991, 3.

SECTION FOUR

'OTHERS ARE YOUR MASTERS':

DISSENT, DEMOCRACY AND REFORM, 1976-1984

Introduction

The final section of this study will cover the late 1970s and early 1980s. In many respects the sources of conflict and discontent in workplaces in these years were very similar to those of the mid-1950s, and the solutions advanced by Party and enterprise authorities, including the revitalization of the official unions and the workers' congress, are also familiar to us from that period. Without attempting to push the analogy too far, it could also be said that the posters and unofficial journals of the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978-81¹ represented an opportunity for workers' grievances to be aired in public, an opportunity which in the 1950s was provided by an unusually outspoken official press during the Hundred Flowers campaign. The final point of similarity between the two periods is the influence of events in Eastern Europe. The strike at the Lenin Shipyard and the rise of Solidarity were reported by both official and unofficial sources in China, and concerns about the possibility of a Chinese Solidarity seem to have loomed large in the thinking

1 This movement was widely referred to just as the Democracy Movement (eg in Robin Munro's 'China's Democracy Movement: A midwinter spring' (Survey 28, 2 (121) (Summer 1984)) during the 1980s. I will be referring to it as the Democracy Wall Movement to distinguish it from the spring 1989 movement. The term is intended to encompass the whole of the 'unofficial publication' movement which lasted until April 1981, and not just the initial wall-poster phase of the movement in the winter of 1978-9.

of CCP leaders from the second half of 1980.² These concerns are in fact evident throughout the 1980s, and probably contributed to the early targeting of workers' organizations for suppression during the 1989 Democracy Movement.

But the very fact that unofficial journals and sources of information existed shows the difference between the mid-1950s and the post-Mao era, and this difference can be traced in large part to the impact of the Cultural Revolution. Young workers and students who had gained experience of political activity and challenging authority during the Cultural Revolution were the mainstay of the Democracy Wall Movement. Former Red Guards dominated the editorial boards of many unofficial journals³, and the concerns of the Cultural Revolution, such as the rise of a new bureaucratic ruling class in China, questions of ownership and control in industry, and the desirability of a Paris Commune form of organization, were evident in the Movement's writings.⁴

2 See for example Liao Gailong, 'The "1980 Reform" program of China', reprinted in *Qishi Niandai* 134 (1.3.81), 38-48; translated in *FBIS* 16.3.81, U1-19, especially U10-11.

3 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall and the unofficial journals*, 14-15; Xiao Ping, 'The rise and decline of China's Democracy Movement', translated in *Issues and Studies* 22, 1 (January 1986), 155. Stanley Rosen comments on the Rebel background of many Guangzhou activists in 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement in Cultural Revolution perspective', *China Quarterly* # (date), 4.

4 On the Paris Commune, see for example Lu Min, 'Zhubu feichu guanliao tizhi he jianli Bali Gongshe de minzhu zhidu' (Gradually do away with the bureaucratic system and establish the democratic system of the Paris Commune), *Beijing zhi Chun* (Beijing Spring) 1 (8.1.79), 17-37, and 2 (27.1.79, 13-16, reprinted in Claude Widor (ed.) *Documents on the Chinese Democratic Movement 1978-80: Unofficial magazines and wall-posters* (vol.2) (hereafter *Documents*), 105-109, 202-205. An article in the *Nanfang Ribao* (10.6.79, 2-3) agreed that the Paris Commune form was the correct way to tackle bureaucratism in China. Official denials that any

As was mentioned in the last section, Liu Guokai and others identified the Cultural Revolution proper (1966-1969) as a time when, albeit briefly, people were actually able to exercise the democratic rights laid down for them in the constitution, speaking out against cadres and organizing themselves. After the subsequent period of rule by the Gang of Four, former Cultural Revolution activists were more determined than ever to achieve clear legal guarantees of these rights, so that they would no longer be something which the Party could grant or withhold according to its own interests. Harking back to the Li Yizhe group's poster in Guangzhou in 1974, the unofficial journals were full of discussions on socialist democracy and the legal system⁵, and demanded legal guarantees of citizens' rights, especially the rights of freedom of speech, publication and organization. Given the links between the Cultural Revolution and Democracy Wall in terms of both participants and issues, it is not surprising that the authorities condemned some of the Democracy Wall activists for wanting to launch a 'second Cultural Revolution' against the Party bureaucracy⁶.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, then, we find a political movement going on in which a minority of workers were actively involved, and which addressed the concerns and grievances of many Chinese workers in the early years of the reform era. All this was taking place against a background of widespread discontent and low morale among industrial workers generally. Strikes and demonstrations involving workers broke out in a number of cities in various parts of China, including

new bureaucratic ruling class existed in China were frequent during the Democracy Wall Movement: see *Nanfeng Ribao* 31.5.79, 2; *Hongqi* 5 (1.3.81), 12-18.

5 See Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 74.

6 *Hongqi* 5 (1.3.81), 17.

Guangdong⁷, and there were reports of attempts to form independent unions in some cities.⁸ The authorities and the official press drew links between these two phenomena, Democracy Wall and the rising tide of industrial unrest, with official newspapers condemning the 'methods of a minority' who were resorting to strikes, demonstrations, petitions and speech-making in pursuit of rapid democratization or 'extreme democratization'.⁹

The Party's concerns about industrial unrest and the possibility of more widespread worker participation in the movement seem to have been a factor in its decision finally to suppress the movement in the early 1980s, and predictions of

7 See for example An Zhiguo, 'On the question of disturbances created by small numbers of people', *Beijing Review* 24, 15 (13.4.81), 3; *China Daily* 8.10.81, 3, in *FBIS-CHI* 9.10.81, Q1; *SWB/FE/6715/BII*, 5; Jeanne Wilson, '"The Polish Lesson": China and Poland 1980-1990', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23, 3-4 (Autumn/Winter 1990), 260-263. A series of strikes and other 'economic disturbances' in Guangdong province was reported at the end of January 1981 (Hezhong News Agency, Beijing, cited in *Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 18).

8 Wilson, '"The Polish Lesson"', 263. To the list compiled by Wilson of places where strikes and demands for independent unions had occurred (Wuhan, Taiyuan, Anshan, Shanghai and Kunming), *Shiyue Pinglun* adds Shandong (*Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 18), and a report of demonstrating workers in Lhasa demanding an independent trade union (47). Chen-chang Chiang reports demands for free unions made by Shanghai workers from a steel mill, a diesel engine plant and other enterprises early in 1981, citing Taiwanese sources, and also notes the Shanxi case and others in Chongqing, Nanchang and parts of Xinjiang (Chen-chang Chiang, 'The role of trade unions in mainland China', *Issues and Studies* 26, 2 (February 1990), 92-92).

9 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 31.5.79, 2; *Renmin Ribao* 8.2.80, 1.

a 'Polish crisis' in China reinforced the decision.¹⁰ Workers' grievances were certainly able to find expression in the publications of the movement and there were signs of workers' support for its aims¹¹. Although there were in fact no direct organizational links between Democracy Wall activists and groups of striking workers, many activists saw this as a weakness of the Chinese movement and called for Democracy Wall to forge links both with Chinese labour *en masse* and with the international labour movement.¹² Some of the movement's activists 'tried hard to widen its social base by organizing, publicizing and defending struggles for higher wages and better conditions in the factories.'¹³

Despite the lack of an organizational framework encompassing mass industrial unrest and the unofficial journals that were the mainstay of Democracy Wall, we must conclude that the authorities were right to fear the power of the two combined. Democracy Wall activists reported the activities of Poland's Solidarity, and explicitly drew

10 See for example 'The Polish Lesson': China and Poland, 1980-1990', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23, 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1990), 259-279; and Liao Gailong, 'The "1980 reform" program of China', reprinted in *Qishi Niandai* 134 (1.3.81), 38-48; translated in *FBIS* 16.3.81, U10.

11 See Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 35-6.

12 See the comments of He Qiu as reported in *Shiyue Pinglun* [October Review] 66 (1982), 3; and *Guanchajia* 36 (October 1980), 14. He Qiu, a shipyard worker and former Red Guard, was editor of the Guangzhou Democracy Wall journals *Renmin zhi Sheng* [People's Voice] (with Liu Guokai, among others) and *Renmin zhi Lu* (People's Road), later renamed *Ziyou Tan* (Free talks).

13 Gregor Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 120. The particular case to which this comment forms part of an introduction is a strike at the Taiyuan steel works in early 1981, which drew praise and support from the local unofficial journal *Fengfan* (Sailing Ship). More will be said about this strike later. (The Chinese text is reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 51 (1981), 20.)

parallels between the economic and political crisis which had given rise to the independent union and conditions in China. Some looked forward to a Chinese Solidarity; they were always looking for Chinese working-class examples of resistance to the rule of the 'bureaucratic privileged class', and the unrest of this period gave them plenty of material for their journals.¹⁴ Since so many activists, in Guangzhou as elsewhere, were workers themselves, they were able to link the immediate, local concerns of workers with international trends in the socialist camp in a way which was potentially quite threatening to the CCP.

At the same time as they were condemning the 'handful' who were stirring up discontent and protest among the workers, however, the Party-state authorities had their own reasons for wishing to tackle workers' low morale and alienation from management and the official unions, since an increase in industrial productivity and greater worker commitment to the success of enterprises were vital to the economic reforms then being launched.¹⁵ So within enterprises, considerable

14 Articles on Solidarity appeared in a number of unofficial journals, including Qingdao's *Hailanghua* [Seaspray] 7 (26.8.80) (reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 60 (1981), 34), and *Lilun Qi* (Theoretical Banner), February 1981, translated in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53/4 (1981), 94-5. Beijing's *Siwu Luntan* (April Fifth Forum) also produced an open letter of congratulation to Lech Walesa and a message of support for the Polish workers in September 1980 (translated in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 86-7). *Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 45-49, reports that more than ten unofficial journals reported the initial success of Solidarity, while journals in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Taiyuan also expressed support for Solidarity, and the latter two and *Zeren* (Duty), the organ of the National Federation of Unofficial Journals formed in the autumn of 1980, reprinted Solidarity's '21 Demands' and 'Charter of Rights of the Polish workers'.

15 The urban reforms are often referred to as having begun in 1984, when the first sets of regulations on many reforms were issued, but a great deal of discussion and experimentation went on beforehand,

concessions were being offered in the direction of greater participation in management, a more powerful workers' congress and greater union autonomy, even while the final suppression of the Democracy Wall Movement was taking place.

Designed to give workers more of a stake in their enterprises and to restore management legitimacy after the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, reforms in the direction of more democratic management were part of the overall programme of industrial reform and had their own economic rationale. But they also bore the hallmarks of Democracy Wall, and, going further back, of the Li Yizhe debate on democracy and the legal system. In article after article on the role of the unions and the workers' congress, for example, the focus is on establishing a transparent and inviolable framework of legal rights and responsibilities which the politically powerful would not be able to flout with impunity. Official promotion of democratic management and workers' participation is permeated with the language of the democracy movement¹⁶, and the influence of this political movement should not be disregarded when considering why a reform programme was introduced which aimed specifically at regaining workers' allegiance to the enterprise and to the official unions.

beginning at the end of the 1970s, and Guangdong was often in the forefront of these experiments.

- 16 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 18.11.80, 2, and 7.11.81, 1; *Nanfang Ribao* 9.2.80, 2 and 4; *Beijing Review* 23, 52 (29.12.80), 17. Indeed, Democracy Wall activists complained bitterly that reformist cadres had already taken up and implemented many of their ideas as well as their discourse, arguing that this proved they were not dangerous dissidents, but patriotic socialists concerned with the fate of their country and putting forward suggestions for improvement (see the article 'Jiujing shei weifa? [Who are the real law-breakers?]' from Guangzhou's *Ziyou Tan*, reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 55 (1981), 20-21).

In this section, then, we will first of all look at the Democracy Wall Movement itself with reference to workers, examining both the background of worker discontent and grievances which the movement's publications helped to expose, and the ideas of some of the worker-activists involved in the movement. We will then go on to look at proposed and actual reforms in the workplace in the direction of democratic management and a more independent union organization, relating these developments both to the pressure of the Democracy Wall Movement and to the economic reforms. Aspects of the reforms of the 1980s, such as the role of the unions and the workers' congress, will be compared with their 1950s predecessors, and the reasons why they failed to live up to early expectations will be examined. Finally, we will try to determine to what extent these events of 1978-81 can be regarded as a precedent for worker involvement in the 1989 Democracy Movement.

Once again the focus will be on Guangzhou, despite the fact that the Democracy Wall Movement there is generally judged to have been comparatively weak in its early stages. It has been noted that the Guangzhou movement did not produce a Wei Jingsheng or a Fu Yuehua, being dominated instead by Marxists who pledged support to the Four Modernizations and, for the most part, to the CCP under Deng.¹⁷ But Guangzhou did have such prominent names as Wang Xizhe, He Qiu and Liu Guokai, and the journal *Renmin zhi Sheng* was widely known and read outside the south of China. Moreover, the latter two activists were both workers, and the three journals they were involved in producing had a largely working-class audience as well, which makes them highly relevant to this study. Guangzhou has also been in the forefront of the economic reforms, which means that the impact of measures which have greatly affected workers' lives has often been felt there first.

17 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 12.

However, while continuing to focus on this city, this section will also draw on case studies and the work of Democracy Wall activists elsewhere in China. Much of the attention given to the movement outside China and also within it was focused on Beijing, and consequently the capital's unofficial journals, demonstrations, election campaigns etc. tend to dominate both the secondary literature and the primary material which has found its way out of the country. Although Guangzhou's proximity to Hong Kong meant that a great deal of material published in *Renmin zhi Sheng*, *Renmin zhi Lu*, and *Ziyou Tan* reappeared in various Hong Kong magazines, the pieces reproduced tended to be of a particular type. They were mostly concerned either with 'high' politics, such as evaluations of Mao and prescriptions of future political systems for China, or with the actual workings of the movement, such as the struggle to legalize and to gain legal guarantees of freedom of publication, and reports of arrests, trials and sentencing of activists. Much less was reprinted on questions of workers' low living standards, even though the main Guangzhou journals covered this extensively. Consequently evidence to support the conclusions of this section is drawn from cities other than Guangzhou more frequently than was the case in previous sections.

Democracy Wall

Background: the 'April Fifth Movement' of 1976¹⁸

The Democracy Wall Movement began in mid-November 1978 in Beijing with the posting of large numbers of big-character posters on the wall in Xidan, to the west of Tiananmen Square, which gave the movement its name.¹⁹ As well as posters, unofficial journals soon began circulating in Beijing and in

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- 18 The demonstrations in late March and early April 1976, which included the well-known Tiananmen Incident in Beijing, were referred to by many Democracy Wall activists as the April 5 Movement. This term has the merit of not implying any geographical limitation of the movement to the capital alone. On the movement in other cities, see Philip Williams, 'Some provincial precursors of popular dissent movements in Beijing', *China Information* 6, 1 (Summer 1991), 1-9; Keith Forster, 'The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident in Hangchow', *Issues and Studies* 22, 4 (April 1986), 13-33; Sebastian Heilmann, *Nanking 1976: Spontane Massenbewegung im Gefolge der Kulturrevolution*, and 'The social context of mobilization in China: Factions, work units, and activists during the April Fifth Movement', *China Information* 8, 3 (Winter 1993-4), 1-19. Williams identifies a distinct causal relationship between certain provincial protest movements and the Tiananmen Incident (8). On the significance of the Tiananmen Incident itself and the relevance of feeling for or against Zhou Enlai, see Xiao Ping, 'The rise and decline of China's Democracy Movement', originally published in the underground journal *Yecao* (Weeds) in 1983, and translated in *Issues and Studies* 22, 1 (January 1986), 157-8.
- 19 On the development of the Democracy Wall Movement and the unofficial publications, see among others Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 1-38; Mab Huang and James D Seymour, 'Introduction', in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization - China's human rights movement, 1978-1979*; Roger Garside, *Coming alive: China after Mao*; Robin Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement: A midwinter spring', *Survey* 28, 2 (Summer 1984), 70-98; Susan Shirk, 'Going against the Tide: Political dissent in China', *Survey* 24, 1 (Winter 1979), 82-114.

other cities all over China, including Guangzhou, Changsha, Wuhan, Taiyuan, Tianjin, Qingdao, Harbin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guiyang and Kunming²⁰. The first wave of posters was sparked off by the November 16 decision to reverse the verdict on the Tiananmen Incident of 1976; this followed hard upon reversals of verdicts on the April Fifth Movements in other cities.²¹ These protests of March and April 1976 had been declared counter-revolutionary at the time, while the Gang of Four were still in power, and Mao's successor Hua Guofeng maintained this verdict until the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee (October-December 1978). The November 15²² declaration that the Tiananmen Incident had in fact been a revolutionary act by the masses against the Gang of Four, together with other decisions taken at this time regarding economic policy and the need for reform, marked the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping and the eclipse of Hua Guofeng and the 'whateverists' in the post-Mao competition for power.

There are clearly close connections in many respects between the April Fifth Movement and Democracy Wall, with the latter originating from demands for the rehabilitation of those involved in the former, and with the first wave of posters in autumn 1978 being sparked off by the reversal of verdicts on 1976. The campaign for recognition of the April Fifth Movement as revolutionary went on throughout the two and a half years separating the two movements, with posters appearing on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Incident (April 5) and the anniversary of Zhou Enlai's death (January 8) in

20 Chen Ruoxi provides an extensive list of unofficial publications, including university journals, in *Democracy Wall*, 107-115.

21 The cities were Nanjing, Hangzhou and Zhengzhou; Garside, *Coming Alive*, 200-201.

22 Announced in *Renmin Ribao* the following day.

both 1977 and 1978.²³ Democracy Wall was often described by its participants as a continuation of April Fifth²⁴. So before going on to the Democracy Wall Movement itself, we must first look at the events of spring 1976, in which many young workers were also involved.

The 1976 protests, beginning in the provinces and culminating in the Tiananmen Incident, were sparked off by the death of Zhou Enlai in January of that year. Activists in a number of Chinese cities, who were often in touch with one another and aware of what was happening elsewhere in the country, began planning unofficial gatherings in memory of Zhou which were to take place on April 5 (Qing Ming, the traditional day for remembering the dead in China)²⁵. The political overtones of tributes to Zhou were very clear, not least to the Gang of Four; praise for Zhou was an implicit attack on them and their policies. The Gang's control over the media, especially in Shanghai, enabled them to mount coded and eventually overt attacks of their own on Zhou's memory in the months after his death, and it was in part these attacks which inflamed public opinion in some cities to the point where open criticism of the Gang flourished in the form of big-character posters and speeches on the streets.

Nanjing was the scene of one of the most outspoken protests against the Gang beginning in mid-March 1976²⁶.

23 The 1976 movement began as a series of marches and the posting of poems and other posters in honour of Zhou, all of course with very clear political overtones of hostility to the Gang of Four.

24 See the comments by various activists in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 7; 77; 83; 155; 267.

25 See Williams, 'Provincial precursors', 2. In fact, most of the wreaths in Tiananmen Square were laid on April 4, which was a Sunday. It was the removal of these tributes from the Square which prompted the violent unrest of the following day.

26 Ibid., 2.

Heilmann notes that recent Chinese accounts of the April Fifth Movement concur that the movement began in Nanjing and was then taken up in Beijing²⁷; one of the earliest slogans to appear in Tiananmen Square read: 'We are determined to support the Nanjing people in their revolutionary struggle'²⁸. News of events in Nanjing came not through the official media, but from informal contacts between activists and also via the Cultural Revolution method of painting slogans or sticking posters on trains, especially those going to Beijing. These 'mobile billboards' from the movement in Nanjing first began arriving in Beijing on March 31, and according to Heilmann, in the first few days of April so many arrived that station workers were unable to keep up with the cleaning of them²⁹. Trains similarly painted with slogans arrived in Shanghai, the Gang's stronghold, from Hangzhou, scene of a great deal of activity in 1976, and of course the location of serious

27 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 69.

28 Louie and Louie, 'The role of Nanjing University in the Nanjing Incident', *China Quarterly* 86 (June 1981), 332-348, quoted in Williams, 'Provincial precursors', 2. Philip Williams notes a parallel with the 1989 Democracy Movement, when outrage at the news of the massacre in Beijing spurred on the protests in other cities ('Provincial precursors', 3). Rumours of the violent suppression of the Nanjing protests were somewhat exaggerated, but they did have an effect on the development of the movement in Beijing. (The directive circulated to Party committees condemning the Nanjing protests also had the unintended effect of publicizing the existence of these protests (Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 72-3)). In contrast to the relatively mild aftermath of the movement in Nanjing, Chen Ruoxi describes the Tiananmen Incident itself as 'a bloodbath, with tens of thousands killed or injured, and thousands branded as counterrevolutionaries and jailed' (Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 5-6). Heilmann gives figures of 3-4,000 arrests out of 40-50,000 people involved in the movement in Beijing who were investigated as possible 'class enemies', and of between 200 and 400 executed, whereas in Nanjing only a few dozen arrests were made (Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 80).

29 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 70-2.

industrial unrest the previous year which was put down by the PLA.³⁰

Other cities in which major 'April Fifth Incidents' took place included Taiyuan, Zhengzhou, Wuhan and Xi'an³¹, and in most of these cases, as in the Tiananmen Incident itself, the backbone of the movement consisted of young workers. The movement in Nanjing was slightly different in this respect, as it originated with students but had a great deal of worker support. Beijing students were in some cases physically prevented from joining memorial or protest marches, as campus authorities locked the gates and patrolled the grounds during the 'Tiananmen Incident'.³² The young workers and students who did take part in the movement had in common above all their recent political experiences in the Cultural Revolution; many were also familiar with the widely-circulated Li Yizhe tract 'On socialist democracy and the legal system'.³³ Many

30 Forster, 'The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident in Hangchow', 22.

31 See Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 74, 88; Forster, 'The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident in Hangchow', 17; Williams, 'Provincial precursors', 2.

32 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 88, note 3. This is reminiscent of tactics used to prevent students from joining workers' protests in Gdansk and Gdynia in December 1970, as noted by Roman Laba (*The Roots of Solidarity*, 30). However, the key measure there was not just shutting students into their classrooms, but the brainwave of offering them an early start to their Christmas holidays. In both cases there was probably a certain amount of student apathy at work, and perhaps also an awareness of the risks of political activism.

33 Williams, 'Provincial precursors', 3; Zi Chuan, 'Li Yizhe yu wo', *Beidou* 6 (1.11.77), 41. But see also Rosen's comments in 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement in Cultural Revolution perspective', *China Quarterly* 101 (March 1988), 8. Even if the numbers who had actually read a copy of the poster were small, discussion of the case was undoubtedly widespread, and in Guangdong in particular, Li Yizhe members seem to have been allowed on occasion to use 'struggle sessions' organized to condemn them to

were former Red Guards (often Rebels, according to Heilmann³⁴); and many went on to be active in the Democracy Wall Movement from 1978.

Not surprisingly, then, the April Fifth Movement shows a high degree of continuity with Cultural Revolution ideas and forms of action. But since the 1978 reversal of verdicts, the Tiananmen Incident in particular has been presented by the Deng regime as a spontaneous mass act in support of the late Zhou and his protege Deng, and against the Gang of Four (and implicitly against Mao as well); in other words, it has been portrayed as a popular rejection of the Cultural Revolution³⁵. The posters of the April Fifth Movement clearly showed deep popular hostility towards the Gang of Four³⁶ and corresponding respect and support for the former 'capitalist roaders', but as was noted in the last section, it is as well to beware of 'two-line struggle' explanations of popular support for one leader or another. While those involved in these high-level power struggles have a vested interest in claiming the maximum possible mass support for themselves, the social forces which helped to generate mass participation in the Cultural Revolution and the April Fifth Movement are more complicated than the 'two-line struggle' model will allow.

As has already been noted, participants in the April

propagate their views further, even before their well-publicized official rehabilitation early in 1979 (see Chan, Rosen and Unger, *On socialist democracy and the Chinese legal system: The Li Yizhe debates*, 13-14 and 109-114).

34 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 88.

35 This of course goes back to the question of whether the term 'Cultural Revolution' refers to the Gang of Four's period in power (1969-76), or to what we have been referring to as the 'Cultural Revolution proper', the 1966-9 period when the beginnings of a genuine mass movement were discernible.

36 See for example Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 63 (Zhang Chunqiao was named on several posters in Nanjing).

Fifth Movement, whether young workers or students, had in common a background of Cultural Revolution activism and had been influenced by the 1974 Li Yizhe poster. So we can trace a course of development from Red Guard activity in which Zhou and Deng were the capitalist roaders and therefore the enemy, via the Li Yizhe tract with its denunciation of the new bureaucratic rulers of China and 'CCP ultraleftism and autocratic lawlessness'³⁷, which was aimed at the Gang of Four in particular, to 1976, when demonstrators attacked the Gang of Four, the victors in the Cultural Revolution so far as the high-level power struggle was concerned, and praised Zhou and Deng.

An explanation for this apparent 180-degree turn on the part of the young activists is offered by Xiao Ping:

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the rebels chose Mao's temporary advocacy of rebellion and opposition to the bureaucracy rather than Chou's royalism and the status quo. In April 1976, comparing the Gang of Four's extreme leftism and autocracy with Chou's, people supported and longed for the latter. Pro- or anti-Chou, behind their outward emotions, these people were all fighting against the autocracy of the privileged bureaucratic class.³⁸

Wang Xizhe (one of the four members of the Li Yizhe group) made a similar point when he described the Tiananmen Incident, as

a spontaneous opinion poll ... an authentic people's election... This was the brave attempt of the people to recapture the Party and the state that had

37 Williams, 'Provincial precursors', 3.

38 Xiao Ping, 'Rise and decline', 162.

been increasingly alienated from them ... it was not an accident resulting from the usurpation of power by the Gang of Four. It was only an exposure and verification for society ... of our Party's alienation from the people.³⁹

In other words, the people had acted against not only the Gang of Four but against the broader problem of their lack of control over the Party which ruled in their name, the lack of control which had left them unable to 'recall' the Gang themselves. In doing so, the participants in the April Fifth Movement had issued a warning to those in the Party who did not support the Gang, making them fully aware of the need for radical change in the Party's relationship with the people before it was too late.

Democracy Wall

There is considerable evidence, then, that the April Fifth Movement was directed not just at the Gang of Four themselves, but more broadly at a Party elite which was a law unto itself, and which enjoyed not only a monopoly of political power but also considerable material privileges. Democracy Wall activists saw themselves as carrying on the process begun by April Fifth, described it variously as 'a human rights movement'⁴⁰ and 'a revolutionary movement against autocracy and dictatorship'⁴¹. The violent suppression of the

39 Wang Xizhe, 'Strive for the class dictatorship of the proletariat', translated in Chan, Rosen and Unger (eds.), *On socialist democracy and the Chinese Legal System*, 148.

40 Declaration of the China Human Rights League, Beijing, January 1979, in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 83.

41 As in the article 'Democracy and national construction', from the unofficial journal *Democracy and Modernity*, and Li Jiahua's commentary on Huang

Tiananmen Incident, in particular, was identified as evidence that the Chinese people still did not enjoy 'even the most rudimentary form of democracy and human rights'⁴², thus underlining the necessity of a movement such as Democracy Wall, a movement which aimed at establishing democracy and legal protection of citizens' rights.

Human rights and democracy were not the only important issues discussed in the Democracy Wall Movement's writings, however. In fact, human rights soon proved to be a problematic topic, partly because it was linked in many people's minds with foreign influences: the recent Helsinki Accords, the Carter presidency, the activities of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and so on.⁴³ For this reason, some groups preferred the term 'citizens' rights', emphasizing that these were rights already enshrined in the constitution, and signalling their intention to keep the movement 'domestic and legal, unrelated to and uninfluenced by any foreigners.'⁴⁴ Particularly after the arrests in 1979 of Fu Yuehua and Wei Jingsheng, two activists who had been particularly outspoken on the topic, 'human rights subsequently were significantly downplayed in the journals.'⁴⁵ But legal reform, equality before the law, and freedom of speech, publication and organization continued to be a strong theme; all of these issues were of course vital to the unofficial journals' continued existence.

Xiang's poem 'No, you have not died', both translated in *ibid.*, 155 and 267.

42 Li Jiahua's commentary, *ibid.*, 267.

43 See for example the interview with Xu Wenli (co-founder, with Liu Qing, of *Siwu Luntan*) first published in *Le Monde* 6.2.80; excerpts translated in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 51-55.

44 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 70. Chen refers specifically to the April Fifth Forum group, of which Xu Wenli was a member.

45 *Ibid.*, 73.

Many other issues continued to be raised in Democracy Wall's unofficial journals, including subjects which were of great relevance to workers, such as economic conditions, living standards, and industrial organization and management. That these concerns were given so much space in many of the journals, including Guangzhou's *Renmin zhi Sheng*, shows that the activist minority had a great deal in common with the industrial workforce as a whole, which at this time was frequently involved in disputes and protests over these issues. As was the case in previous periods of unrest, many disputes, while often sparked off by a specific grievance over wages or conditions, had definite political overtones and tended to develop into a confrontation between the Party authorities on the one hand, and on the other, workers who felt exploited by the privileged officials who were supposed to be their 'humble servants', and who were now more and more prepared to organize themselves in defence of their rights. The next section deals with the various types of economic and political issue which most directly concerned workers in more detail.

Concerns of Democracy Wall

Part of the reason for the widespread opposition to the Gang of Four displayed through much of urban China in the April Fifth Movement was the state of the economy after seven years of their stewardship. Stagnating production and a prolonged wage freeze formed the economic backdrop to the 1976 protests: in the case of Nanjing, discontent was fuelled by rumours from Shanghai, the main centre of influence of the Gang of Four, about wage rises for the workers of that city at a time when the Gang were still preaching the virtues of egalitarianism and frugality to all other workers.⁴⁶ Although it was political issues, notably the danger of a 'left'

46 See Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 44, and 62-63.

successor to Mao, which dominated the April Fifth protests, we should note that the Four Modernizations programme had already been announced (in 1975), and was closely associated with Zhou and Deng. Thus the question of the future economic direction of the country and the prospect for an improvement in standards of living were integral to the movement's concerns.

Economic problems, both macro and micro, were also a concern of Democracy Wall, with many contributing to the debate on how reform should proceed. These economic questions were, of course, closely bound up with the political issues of democracy, representation and accountability, as is shown by the way in which the question of economic reform was tackled in the unofficial journals of the Democracy Wall movement. This link was also acknowledged initially in Deng's programme of economic reforms launched late in 1978, although there were variations over time in the extent to which the Party concurred with Democracy Wall activists' assertion that economic development was dependent on democratization and effective public supervision of government.⁴⁷

Workers' grievances: Living standards, pay and welfare

The economic problems which were discussed in many Democracy Wall publications can be divided into two broad categories: popular standards of living, and questions relating to the management of work units and industrial organization. Taking discussions of living standards first, we find particular attention being paid to the problem of urban housing shortages. The extremely cramped living conditions of many households were commonly contrasted with the building by cadres of comparatively luxurious dwellings for themselves and their relatives. This shows that the issue

47 See Stanley Rosen's comments on democracy as a means and as an end in itself, in 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 9-10.

of cadre privilege had not gone away and that, as in the mid-1950s when workers' housing was also a controversial political and economic issue, it was perceived inequality and inequity rather than poor housing per se that was the real issue.

One difference between the Hundred Flowers period and the late 1970s, however, was that China's overall state of underdevelopment was now being called into question by young people who looked at what had been achieved by thirty years of 'building socialism' and were distinctly unimpressed.⁴⁸ Unfavourable comparisons of China with the capitalist West seem to have been fairly common during Democracy Wall and later in the 1980s, although this did not mean that activists were uncritical of the West either. But doubts clearly existed about the 'superiority of socialism' and specifically about workers' position in society, since they were supposed to be 'the masters', yet in most cases had a very low standard of living. Questions along these lines required the authorities to demonstrate the advantages workers enjoyed under socialism, especially the right to participate in management and to elect democratically some of the enterprise leadership. These comparisons and criticisms of China from the point of view of workers' standard of living therefore helped to increase pressure for a real democratization of management, as well as for more obvious measures like price stabilization and improved welfare. More will be said about this later.

The inadequate living space of many workers' households in a Beijing textile plant was exposed in an article reprinted

48 See the reported comments of a school student in Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 75. Many articles appeared in the official press during Democracy Wall attempting to refute suggestions that workers were better off under capitalism; see for example *Gongren Ribao* 27.3.79, 1; *Nanfang Ribao* 9.5.79, 3; 15.5.81, 1; 20.5.81, 1; *Hongqi* 4 (February 1981), 45-8; *Renmin Ribao* 27.10.83, 2-4.

in *Beijing zhi Chun* in June 1979⁴⁹, and the housing shortage was the topic of many other items in the same journal.⁵⁰ Qingdao's *Lilun Qi* claimed that since the fall of the Gang of Four, it had become common practice for the 'red bigwigs' to build luxurious properties for themselves and their families, even in a China where the economy was 'on the verge of collapse' and ordinary people were suffering from a shortage of housing.⁵¹ The poem by Ye Wenfu, 'General, you cannot do this!', was inspired by a particular case of abuse of privilege to obtain luxury housing, that of a high-ranking PLA officer alleged to have ordered a kindergarten to be demolished to make way for his new mansion.⁵² Given that so many items in the unofficial journals dwelt on cadre privilege, corruption and 'going through the back door' (*zou houmen*), it is interesting to note that the popular appeal of such attacks predated Democracy Wall by some years. A campaign against such practices had been taken up by the national and regional press in January 1974 and proved enormously popular, but was brought to an end after only a

49 Wei Mingqing, 'Tamen yaoqiu xiuxi de quanli [They demand the right to rest]', originally published in *Qiushi* (Autumn Fruit), version in *Beijing zhi Chun* 6 (17.6.79), 27-9, reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 399-403.

50 See for example the poem by 'a revolutionary citizen', 'Beijing baixing shao zhufang [The ordinary people of Beijing lack housing]', in *Beijing zhi Chun* 1 (8.1.79), reprinted in *ibid.*, 123; 'Zhangguan zhu loutang, xiaomin qiang zhufang [Bosses and officials live in storeyed houses, while the little people compete for any accommodation]', in *Beijing zhi Chun* 7 (10.8.79), 10, reprinted in *ibid.*, 446-7.

51 'Guanliao tequan jieji tongzhi de sangzhong [Death knell for the rule of the bureaucratic privileged class]', *Lilun Qi* (February 1981), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53-4 (1981), 35, and translated in the same issue, 94-5.

52 Originally published in *Shikan* (Poetry) in August 1979, translated in Helen Siu and Zelda Stern (eds.) *Mao's Harvest: Voices from China's new generation*, 158-165).

month ostensibly because it was interfering with the 'pi Lin - pi Kong' campaign also underway at that time. Heilmann notes widespread displeasure at the abrupt halt called to this genuinely popular movement to expose and criticise cadres' corrupt use of connections.⁵³

In Guangzhou, the seriousness of the problem of official abuse of power in the building or allocation of housing was confirmed by official newspaper reports on various cases which began to appear from late 1980.⁵⁴ Corruption cases involving housing were often said to be a particular cause of worker dissatisfaction with management and the higher levels of bureaucracy, and (corrupt) mishandling of housing allocation was sometimes mentioned as the issue which sparked off a strike in this period of relatively frequent industrial unrest.⁵⁵ The extent of concern about cadre abuse of power in the enterprise can be judged from a 1982 *Nanfang Ribao* article praising an enterprise where the workers' congress had been put in charge of the sensitive tasks of housing allocation and the recruitment of employees' offspring to vacancies in the plant. It is clearly implied in this account that this had the effect of preventing abuses of power which were otherwise extremely common; it was specifically noted that of fifty young people who had so far been given jobs, most were the offspring of shop-floor workers, and none were scions of 'leadership' families.⁵⁶

The promotion of material incentives from the end of 1978 and discussion of welfare reform also caused concern among

53 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 32-3.

54 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 9.2.80, 2 and 4; 6.4.81, 1; 5.10.81, 1; *Guangzhou Ribao* 21.1.84, 1; 29.1.84, 1; 3.7.84, 1 and 2.

55 See for example *Xinhua News Agency* 28.4.81, in *SWB-FE* 6715/BII/5; *China Daily* 8.10.81, 3, in *FBIS* 9.10.81, Q1.

56 *Nanfang Ribao* 15.4.82, 2.

many workers, and these concerns were reflected in the unofficial journals. Bonuses were a particular bone of contention. These payments were intended to break the egalitarian, 'eating from one big pot' mentality among the industrial workforce by rewarding workers individually for their performance under the principle of 'more pay for more work'. In fact, in the short term at least, the use of individual performance-related bonuses proved singularly unsuccessful in ending wage egalitarianism. Susan Shirk has noted that the awarding of bonuses by workers themselves in small-group 'evaluation and comparison' sessions resulted in a strongly egalitarian distribution of the extra money. Measures to combat this seem to have been easily circumvented by such means as informal rotation systems, with workers taking turns to receive the highest bonuses, or simply by exerting pressure on those receiving high bonuses to share their good fortune with their workmates in the form of gifts or meals⁵⁷.

Despite repeated assertions in the press that 'eating from the same big pot' was damaging to the interests of the state, the enterprise and the individual alike, and that egalitarianism was not equivalent to socialism⁵⁸, these attitudes seem to have persisted. It is interesting to note that although the low-wage policy in force from the 1950s up until 1978 was itself a source of discontent, with the Cultural Revolution-era wage freezes a particular cause of complaint, there seems to have been little enthusiasm for widening income differentials in industry, with many workers instead favouring a relatively egalitarian distribution of a bigger 'cake'. The 'them and us' hostility towards cadres

57 Shirk, 'Recent Chinese labour policies and the transformation of industrial organization in China', *China Quarterly* 88 (December 1981), 585.

58 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 9.10.79, 1; 21.6.81, 1; 21.8.81, 1; *Guangzhou Ribao* 14.5.84, 3; 26.8.84, 1.

characteristic of the Cultural Revolution seems to have lingered on in some respects, with some workers emphasizing that all of them 'made a contribution to socialism' and 'created wealth' for society (and thus should be rewarded equally), while the cadres who were criticized for building themselves luxurious villas created nothing.⁵⁹

This does not seem to have been a case of the cynical or subversive use of the regime's own rhetoric such as we saw in the late 1960s, but seems to reflect a genuine sense of the rightful place of the working class in society. Even after more than ten years of reform, workers active in Beijing's *Gongzilian* (Workers' Autonomous Federation) in 1989 were still claiming their status as 'the rightful masters of this nation'⁶⁰, showing the persistence of these values despite the vast changes that had taken place in China's economy and society by the end of the 1980s. Similarly, when various Democracy Wall publications were under pressure from the authorities in Guangzhou, in their defence the editorial boards of both *Renmin zhi Sheng* and *Ziyou Tan* repeated in their official statements that all, or almost all, of them were 'permanently employed workers'⁶¹, or 'ideologically aware

59 See for example 'Guanliao tequan jieji tongzhi de sangzhong [Death knell for the rule of the bureaucratic privileged class]', by the editorial committee of the Qingdao journal *Lilun Qi* (February 1981), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53-4 (1981), 35; 'Zhongguo gongrenjieji de xin juexing [The new awakening of the Chinese working class]', in the Taiyuan unofficial journal *Fengfan* (n.d.), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 51 (1981), 11.

60 *Gongzilian* leaflet, quoted in Andrew Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, 'Workers in the Tiananmen protests: The politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 29 (January 1993), 12.

61 Statement by the editorial board of *Renmin zhi Sheng* (edited by Liu Guokai), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 46 (1980), 12. All of the board were said to be permanent workers.

young factory workers'⁶², emphasizing their status in Chinese society and their right, as workers, to participate in decision-making on the future of that society.

The phenomenon of different pay for the same work, a major cause of dissatisfaction in the 1950s when it led to the widespread adoption of the 'work according to pay' attitude among disgruntled workers, also gave rise to discontent in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The economic reforms, by giving some enterprises more autonomy to retain and dispose of some of their profits and set wages and bonuses as they saw fit, seem to have exacerbated the problem. In some cases the objection was to disparities in pay between workers at different plants, where workers whose enterprise produced a low-profit product would see their pay rapidly falling behind workers at another plant with a high value-added output⁶³. In other cases, bonuses within an enterprise would depend on the achievement of norms set for particular work-processes, and it soon became apparent that some workers were unjustly receiving lower bonuses than their colleagues simply because of the specific work-process in which they were engaged, not because they were working less hard or contributing less⁶⁴. Complaints about the unfair distribution of pay and bonuses appeared in a regular 'Workers' Forum' column in the Guangzhou unofficial journal *Renmin zhi Sheng*, as did many general items on local living standards, housing problems, prices and workers' standard of living.⁶⁵

Looking ahead ten years or so, we find that 'unfair

62 Statement by the editorial board of *Ziyou Tan* (edited by He Qiu), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 55 (1981), 21. The statement was signed by five members identifying themselves as workers and two listed as students.

63 *Nanfang Ribao* 25.4.80, 1.

64 *Nanfang Ribao* 28.4.80, 1.

65 See Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 57 and 76.

distribution' within enterprises, whether this meant a lack of transparency and accountability in deciding on bonuses, or sharp disparities between the pay and bonuses of managers and those of rank-and-file workers, continued to be a source of discontent within the workforce. Between 1989 and 1991, it was frequently cited as a cause of strikes (or 'unexpected events', as the ACFTU euphemistically termed them), and the official unions called for steps to be taken to correct it.⁶⁶

In many respects early reform measures and the debate about future changes seemed to pose a threat to workers' job security and to the welfare benefits they had hitherto enjoyed. Articles in the official press suggested that far too much was expected of enterprises, particularly smaller ones, in the form of welfare services, and that the provision of these services was an 'irrational burden' detracting from the enterprise's principle economic purpose and its efficiency.⁶⁷ Condemnations of 'eating from one big pot' were soon joined, too, by speculation that the 'iron rice-bowl' of job security might become untenable in the new economic circumstances. Moves in this direction were, naturally, extremely unpopular among workers, especially when the system of lifetime tenure for cadres (the 'iron armchair') was still in place.⁶⁸ Many Democracy Wall activists saw the latter as a far more serious problem, an obstacle to democratic

66 See Gongren Ribao 25.7.89, in Gongren Zuzhi yu Huodong (Workers' Organization and Activities) 4 (1989), 44-45. Gonghui Xinxi (Union News), a fortnightly internal bulletin of the ACFTU, contains brief reports on various outbreaks of industrial unrest in these years. Discontent and disputes due to unfair distribution are mentioned in the following issues, among others: 21 (1.11.90), 7-10; 6 (15.3.91), 14-16.

67 Nanfang Ribao 10.1.79, 3.

68 Renmin zhi Sheng 12-13 (December 1979), quoted in Chen Ruoxi, Democracy Wall, 77.

accountability in the workplace as well as in government.⁶⁹

These, then, were the major economic grievances of workers aired in the unofficial journals of Democracy Wall. To the mid-1950s concerns of housing, welfare, and bonuses had been added a threat to job security, and also worries that rising incomes might be overtaken by inflation. *Beijing zhi Chun* published a list of prices of basic foodstuffs showing prices before and after 'adjustment' and percentage increases⁷⁰, and in Guangzhou, *Renmin zhi Sheng* kept an eye on wage levels and prices of everyday necessities in its 'Window on the world' section⁷¹. By the early 1980s, the view seems to have become widespread that many workers' standard of living had actually dropped since the implementation of Deng's reform programme at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central

69 Wang Xizhe, for example, pointed to the 'iron chair' as proof that a bureaucratic system existed in China, and called for the principles of the Paris Commune to be implemented, including the right to elect and, most importantly, to recall representatives (Interview with the Guangzhou unofficial journal *Renmin zhi Lu* (edited by He Qiu), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 39 (1979), 16-17). At a forum organized by the Guangdong Provincial Communist Youth League on 5 April 1979, Liu Guokai commented that cadres were complacent about ignoring the masses' views once more, now that talk of subjecting them to election had faded away; the possibility of facing democratic elections had improved their attitude for a time (see *Qishi Niandai* (June 1980), 54-6). In late 1980, at a time when official policy came closest to meeting the demands being put forward by Democracy Wall and by workers in general, *Nanfang Ribao* carried two articles on the system of lifetime tenure for cadres, accepting the need for reform in order to combat bureaucratism and recommending truly democratic elections as the best way of ensuring that cadres were responsible to the lower levels as well as the higher and did not become alienated from the masses (*Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.80, 2; 9.11.80, 1).

70 *Beijing zhi Chun* 4 (2.4.79), 26, reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 299.

71 Quoted in Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 57.

Committee, so much so that articles appeared in the official press attempting to refute this claim.

In a 'campaign to draw up detailed accounts', the authorities insisted that real wage increases had more than kept pace with rising prices (rising food prices were of course a knock-on effect of the agricultural reforms), and also pointed to some success in finding temporary work for the offspring of worker households, thus reducing the burden on the household budget.⁷² Whatever the truth of the matter, it is clear that many workers perceived their standard of living to have dropped, contrary to the promises made by the reformers in the leadership; in recent parlance, the 'feel-good factor' was most definitely lacking. Inflation was of course one of the major concerns of the workers involved in the 1989 Democracy Movement, about which more will be said later. Party leaders must also have been aware of the fact that increases in food prices had sparked off the strikes in Poland both in December 1970 and in August 1980.⁷³

In sum, then, it was not just obviously disadvantaged groups (such as the unemployed, rusticated youth illegally returned to the cities, or peasants come to the capital to seek redress for injustices and reduced to begging on the streets) who were concerned about their livelihood and had economic grievances for which the unofficial press of Democracy Wall provided an outlet. Ordinary workers' households were greatly concerned about present difficulties and threats to their livelihood in the future, and the many unofficial journals edited by workers (such as *Renmin zhi Sheng* and *Renmin zhi Lu* in Guangzhou) not surprisingly gave a great deal of space to their views.

72 *Nanfang Ribao* 3.5.82, 2.

73 *Xinhua News Agency* (18.12.80), in *SWB/FE/6606/A2/1*, reporting on Solidarity, mentions the role of meat price increases in sparking off the shipyard strike.

Workers' grievances: Enterprise management

State of the unions

As was noted in the introduction to this section, there are many parallels to be drawn between sources of discontent in the mid-1950s and during the Democracy Wall Movement. This is particularly true if we look at the area of industrial organization and enterprise management. As in the Hundred Flowers era, the official trade unions were in crisis, with workers' faith in them at a very low ebb and even some suggestions that there was no point in their continuing to exist. In his address to the Ninth ACFTU Congress in October 1978, Deng Xiaoping found it necessary to state that the official unions were 'no longer an unnecessary organization as some believed.'⁷⁴ Workers described their official representatives as 'sign-board unions'⁷⁵ (i.e. unions in name only) who did nothing for them, did not represent their views (or even know what their views were), did not stand up to the Party Committee or management on their behalf, and did not even hold regular meetings in some cases.⁷⁶

Given the extremely high level of dissatisfaction with the unions' performance, it is not surprising that there were a number of attempts by striking and protesting workers to form independent unions, especially once they had the example of Poland's Solidarity before them. Several outbreaks of industrial unrest in China in the early 1980s were reported to

74 Deng Xiaoping, 'Greeting the great task', *Beijing Review* 21, 42 (20.10.78), 7.

75 See various *Xinhua News Agency* reports in SWB/FE/6244/BII/14 (10.10.79), SWB/FE/6595/BII/1 (4.12.80).

76 See for example three articles in *Gongren Ribao* 18.11.80, 2, in *China Report: Economic Affairs* 120 (16.3.81), 53-5.

have culminated in a demand for free trade unions to be established⁷⁷, including one in Taiyuan in 1981.⁷⁸ The dispute at the Taiyuan Iron and Steel works started as a protest by single workers living in at the plant (i.e. workers who, although married, lived away from their families in factory dormitories) over their living and working conditions. These could be construed as narrowly economic demands, but, as with the undeclared strike on the Guangzhou docks in 1957, for example, the dispute inevitably became a confrontation between the workers and the Party organization, with whom the real power in the enterprise still lay.

One of Taiyuan's unofficial journals, *Fengfan*, made clear the view within the movement that such spontaneous collective actions by workers signalled a challenge to the Party itself, since it showed that workers were aware of the need to organize themselves when their official representatives failed them:

They understand that if they want to change their wretched conditions, they cannot rely on any messiah, but must begin to organize themselves, to rely on their own strength, and to elect their own representatives to speak for them, and if at any time their elected representatives do not represent them properly, they will be recalled and another election held. This sort of demand on the part of the broad popular masses is the social basis for

77 See Wilson, 'Labor policy in China: Reform and retrogression', *Problems of Communism* 39, 5 (September-October 1990), 54; Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 85; *FBIS-CHI* 29.1.81, P1, 20.2.81, H1, and 9.10.81, Q1; *SWB/FE/6175/B11/4-6*; and note 8 above.

78 See Wilson, 'Labor policy in China', 54; *FBIS-CHI* 3.3.81, R1. Reports on Taiyuan also appeared in, among others, the *Washington Post* (30.4.81), and the *New York Times* (5.3.81).

The journal's account also made it clear that the dispute was about the defence of workers' legal rights; this is a phrase which crops up continually in Democracy Wall writings, and it too gives political content to what might otherwise be classed as economic demands.

One of the demands of the workers concerned was to have their own special representatives on the workers' congress.⁸⁰ This shows that as things stood, despite two years or so of reform and the official promotion of the workers' congress, these workers still felt that it could not represent or defend their interests. In addition, we can see a natural progression from wanting separate representation on an officially-sanctioned body to deciding that it was necessary for workers to have their own, self-organized and autonomous unions if they were not to succumb to further exploitation and oppression. Fengfan explicitly linked contemporary workers' protests with a long line of struggles against exploitation going right back to the nineteenth century, and gave as the motive for the most recent outbreaks of unrest the following description of workers' situation:

Under the bureaucratic system, their glorious title of master bears no resemblance to their actual position of powerlessness; their standard of living bears no resemblance to that of the privileged bureaucrats; the improvement in their livelihood bears no relation to the development of the social

79 Part of Fengfan's account of the strike and its significance (The new awakening of the Chinese working class', in *Shiyue Pinglun* 51 (1981), 11) is translated in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 120-121. This quotation author's own translation.

80 See Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 35-6.

productive forces ...⁸¹

This account of the Taiyuan unrest makes no mention of any involvement of the official trade unions; only 'leadership cadres' and Party Committee members are mentioned. This probably indicates that workers didn't expect the official unions to help them in pressing what they saw as reasonable claims for improved conditions, but went straight to those in authority who did have some power in the enterprise. As in the 1950s, the official formula for dealing with workers' grievances was that if their demands were reasonable, they should be met; if they were justified but could not be met straight away, then the reasons should be explained to the workers concerned; and if they were not reasonable, then the workers should be told why they were not reasonable. But in this case, the reaction of enterprise leaders was immediate condemnation: the workers were accused of holding 'black meetings' when they met together to discuss demands, and were accused of carrying out *chuanlian* when they visited each other, in an apparent attempt to paint them as Red Guard-type hooligans and supporters of the Gang of Four. Given that the approved channels for presenting demands and resolving disputes appeared not to be working at all, it is not surprising that self-organization began to occur. The backlog of economic grievances and widespread resentment at official privilege fuelled it, and Cultural Revolution experiences of organized action outside Party control provided a relevant precedent. But the influence of Solidarity, among ordinary workers as well as Democracy Wall activists⁸², was undoubtedly also extremely important in pushing Chinese workers to form their own, independent trade unions.

81 Fengfan, 'The new awakening of the Chinese working class', in *Shiyue Pinglun* 51 (1981), 11.

82 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 35.

Despite the reform effort of the early 1980s, the unions do not seem to have been able to make much progress in gaining workers' confidence and support. A survey conducted by the ACFTU in 1988 showed that less than 10% of the workers surveyed felt that the unions 'could speak for the workers and solve their problems'⁸³. As more workers were affected by lay-offs from loss-making state enterprises, and as contract employment became more widespread, increasing insecurity, the unions' task became even more difficult. Internal ACFTU bulletins make explicit the unions' view that it was mainly falling standards of living and economic hardship that prompted industrial unrest (once the political upheaval of 1989-91 in the socialist world had receded into the background in the early 1990s), and that the state-controlled unions, brought firmly back under Party control since their tentative support for the 1989 Democracy Movement, could therefore do very little to improve the situation, although they should try to help those in most need wherever possible.⁸⁴

Masters and servants

Behind a large number of the criticisms raised in the unofficial publications and posters of Democracy Wall was one overriding question, a question which was at the centre of the three earlier confrontations between workers and the Party which we have examined in previous sections. This is the question as to whether, or to what extent, workers' theoretical status as masters of the enterprise and the leading class in society had actually been realized. It is this debate which is behind all arguments about the role of management, the enterprise Party Committee and the union, the powers and scope of the workers' congress, the possibility of

83 Chiang Chen-chang, 'The role of trade unions in mainland China', 88.

84 *Gonghui Xinx* 18 (15.9.90), 8-9; 21 (1.11.90), 7-10; 5 (1.3.91), 10-11; 6 (15.3.91), 14-16 and 21-22.

self-management, democratic election of cadres, and the problems of public ownership.

The question of workers' status in the enterprise and in society was addressed more explicitly and more bluntly than ever before by Democracy Wall activists and by protesting workers. There are a number of reasons for this. One is the Cultural Revolution Rebel background of many in the movement: ideas of a new, exploiting ruling class emerging from China's post-revolution elite were not new to them. Thanks to discussion of the ideas of the Li Yizhe group and others, neither were systemic critiques of 'actually existing socialism' in China a completely new departure. With these earlier movements and ideas providing the foundations of the new movement, the way was open for criticism and protest to be taken further. There seems to have been a feeling in the late 1970s, after Mao's death and the fall of the Gang of Four, that now nothing was sacred, and that there was an urgent need to say the previously unsayable and to expose the shortcomings in the way in which Chinese society and the economy were organized.⁸⁵ Calls for a complete reassessment of the whole

85 Explicit or implied criticism of Mao was a feature many of Democracy Wall writings (see for example Wang Xizhe's 'Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution', originally published in the Guangzhou journal edited by Wang, *Xueyou Tongxun* (Learners' Bulletin), in November 1980, and translated in Chan, Rosen and Unger, *On socialist democracy*, 177-260). As is true of Democracy Wall in general, these attacks were initially useful to Deng Xiaoping and his 'reform' faction in the Party, as they undermined the legitimacy of Hua Guofeng, whose claim to lead China was based on the fact that he was Mao's personally anointed successor. But as the attacks went on, they began to eat away at the legitimacy of the CCP in general, and fuelled popular cynicism and disillusionment with socialism and the Party. Hence in March 1979, the 'four cardinal principles' of the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, were promulgated in order to define certain limits which Democracy Wall activists should not cross. In June 1981, the question of a reassessment of Mao was

history of CCP rule were now commonplace. With the 'Open Door' trade policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping, there was also more knowledge of the outside world, and this probably also contributed to a more critical attitude towards the achievements of the People's Republic thirty years on from liberation.⁸⁶

Common themes in Democracy Wall writings were the lack of democratic rights enjoyed by workers in Chinese enterprises, which many writers saw as a cause of China's relatively poor economic performance in recent years, and the fact that, although 'the people' nominally owned all state-run industrial enterprises, in fact they had no control over their operations whatsoever. Instead, this control was in the hands of Party and management cadres. One wall-poster put up in Beijing in December 1978, in the early weeks of the movement, put this quite bluntly:

According to the concepts of Marxism-Leninism, the people should control the means of production. But ask yourselves, Chinese workers and peasants: Apart from the small wage which you receive each month, what do you control? What belongs to you? The answer is shameful: Others are your masters. In a socialist society, the product of labor should belong to the worker. But what do you get? Just enough so that you can continue to work! Higher salaries have not sufficed to compensate for soaring

officially settled, after much dispute within the Party, and the 'Decision on certain questions in Party history since the founding of the People's Republic' concluded that Mao's contributions to the revolution outweighed his later mistakes. This, however, failed to bring an end to discussion of Mao's status and contributions. See the discussion of the limits of 'de-Maoization' in Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 80-85.

86 See the interview with Xu Wenli cited above (note 42), 55.

prices, and our standard of living has not improved.⁸⁷

Another article related the problem of actual control over the means of production to the dominance of the Party at all levels and to the system of lifetime tenure for cadres:

In our country, the means of production are not directly controlled by the people but are entrusted to people's representatives - administrative cadres at all levels. For this reason, the people cannot control the means of production unless they have control over the cadres. Since the 'system of posting according to grades' has rendered the people unable to supervise and control the cadres, the socialist economic base will be threatened if this old system is not gradually abolished. And, sooner or later, people's ownership will be turned into ownership by bureaucrats and emperors, and people will be enslaved again.⁸⁸

The April Fifth Forum (a group which broadly supported the reformists in the Chinese leadership), like most Democracy Wall groups was generally in favour of the reforms then beginning to be implemented and supported the 'Four

87 This extract from a longer, five-page poster appears as Document 37 in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 161. Other extracts from the same poster appear as Document 28 (131), and Document 32 (148). The poster was published in *Die Welt* and translated into English in *Freedom at Issue* (May-June 1979).

88 Lu Min, 'Zhubu feichu guanliao tizhi he jianli Bali Gongshe shi de minzhu zhidu [Gradually do away with the bureaucratic system and establish a Paris Commune-style democratic system]', *Beijing zhi Chun* 1 (8.1.79), 17-37, and 2 (27.1.79), 13-16, reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 105-109 and 202-206; translated in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 72-77.

Modernizations', but held the success of the reforms in industry to be conditional on democratization in enterprises. One of its early statements observed that in China, 'the power of the people is the most uneconomically utilized of all', and went on to describe the situation in Chinese industry thus:

If a small number of non-producers in our country control the production workers with regard to their personal files, wages and transfers, it will be impossible to expect the workers to surpass the productivity of labor attained under the capitalist system. It is precisely those who dislike others airing independent political views that are suppressing production workers from expressing their views on production, distribution and exchange. If this is so, laborers under socialism will only be expected to mind their own business as handicraft workers traditionally did in the past.⁸⁹

Wei Jingsheng, in 'The fifth modernization', argued that the poor position of ordinary workers in Chinese society was not simply due to the backwardness of the productive forces; even if that were no longer the case, 'the questions of authority, of domination of distribution, and of exploitation'⁹⁰ would still arise. The question as to whether exploitation and oppression could exist under socialist public ownership was also specifically addressed in some of the unofficial journals. *Hailanghua* of Qingdao, noting that the question had hitherto been ruled out of bounds in the 'nominally socialist world', expressed the view that

89 Poster by Siwu Luntan 28.3.79, translated as April Fifth Forum, 'The state of the economy', in Seymour (ed.) *The Fifth Modernization*, 159-160.

90 Wei Jingsheng, 'The fifth modernization', *Tansuo* (Exploration, the journal edited by Wei), 1 (December 1978), translated in Seymour (ed.), *The fifth modernization*, 51.

exploitation and oppression could actually become worse under a system of bureaucratic, one-party rule as existed in China, as privilege could act as a form of capital.⁹¹

This theme within the Democracy Wall Movement provides evidence of a post-Cultural Revolution and post-Gang of Four diminution in Party legitimacy, and a corresponding increase in political and organizational self-confidence, most notably among the movement's activists, but also among workers and the public at large. It was specifically argued by some that workers (or the people in general) had now shown that they were ready to take over much more of the direct running of their enterprises and of wider economic and political systems as well. This they saw as the beginning of the process of the withering away of the Party and the state as predicted in Marxist theory. The negative example as to what might happen if the Party did not yield to popular demands in this area was the Soviet Union, while the positive example worthy of emulation was Yugoslavia, with its system of workers' self-management.

Wang Xizhe saw the Tiananmen Incident itself as evidence that a new generation of workers was ready to replace the Party's direct administrative leadership with its own. He noted that

91 *Hailanghua* 7 (26.8.80), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 60 (1981), 34. The idea of 'privilege-capital' was developed by Chen Erjin in 'On proletarian-democratic revolution', translated and introduced by Robin Munro in *China: Crossroads socialism*, 18-19. Munro believes Chen Erjin to have been one of the editors of the Qingdao unofficial journal *Lilun Qi*, and to have written for it under the pen name of Lu Ji. That the article quoted above uses Chen's formulation of 'privilege-capital' is not surprising given that the two journals were produced in the same city, and it was common for Democracy Wall activists to contribute ideas and articles to journals other than their own. But since this particular article is attributed to the editorial board of *Hailanghua*, Chen may well also have been a member of the board at this time.

The movement's vanguard and main force were mostly young workers. Isn't that like a huge signpost indicating that an entire generation of industrial workers has grown up with socialist consciousness and culture? When the proletarian enterprise was at its most dangerous moment, when the opportunistic politicians and theoreticians were frightened, trembling, and scared to talk, was it not they who ventured forth, defended the people's welfare, and expressed their great ability to manage society?⁹²

He went on to propose a change in the old Anshan Constitution formula for workers' participation in management in the economic sphere and workers' participation in dictatorship in the political sphere, advocating instead

'direct democratic management by the workers.' The class dictatorship of the proletariat can have its firm material foundation only under conditions in which workers manage the means of production themselves directly and democratically. This was the aim of the Paris Commune, the aim of the October

92 Wang Xizhe, 'Wei wuchanjieji jieyizhuanzheng er nuli [Strive for the class dictatorship of the proletariat]', first printed in the Guangzhou unofficial journal *Renmin zhi Sheng* in September 1979; reprinted in Hong Kong in *Guanchajia* 23 (September 1979), 15; translated in Chan, Rosen and Unger (eds.) *On socialist democracy*, 154. In what appears to be a direct reply to an earlier draft of this piece, the *Nanfang Ribao* published an editorial on 5 April 1979 claiming CCP credit for the Tiananmen Incident, since the young workers and students involved had all grown up and been educated under CCP rule. In his final version, Wang's riposte to this is to point out that similar Party education had been provided to 'those who took part in the suppression of the April Fifth Movement and those comrades who relentlessly beat up others at Tiananmen' (*On socialist democracy*, 155; see also Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 17, note 53).

The level of the industrial enterprise was seen by many as a suitable starting point for workers to take over direct, democratic management while the Party organization took a back seat:

It is necessary to give the workers genuine democratic rights and do away with the administrative leadership power of the basic-level Party organization in industrial enterprises ... Since class struggle is withering now, the Party should also gradually wither away. This should first take place in the basic-level units of industrial enterprises.⁹⁴

Another article by a Beijing worker argued similarly that 'if we want to have a system of democracy in politics, we must insist on a system of people's democracy in economic management.'⁹⁵

Many writers were not only making direct connections between the low morale and poor performance of industrial workers and undemocratic organization in enterprises and in

93 Ibid., 156.

94 See for example Lu Min, 'Quxiao changkuang qiye jiceng dang zuzhi de xingzheng lingdaoquan [Do away with the administrative power of the basic-level Party organization in industrial enterprises]', *Beijing zhi Chun* 2 (27.1.79), 17-19; reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 171-174; translated in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 163-167.

95 Han Zhixiong, 'Tantan jingji guanli minzhu yu zhengzhi minzhu [On democracy in economic management and political democracy]', *Beijing zhi Chun* 2 (27.1.79), 1-2; reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 148-9; translated in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 162.

the country as a whole, stating, for example, that the long-term deterioration in both economic performance and the people's livelihood was entirely 'due to a lack of democracy'⁹⁶. They were also critical of some of the early reform measures taken to remedy the acknowledged lack of democracy in enterprises. One article noted that there was little point in workers being allowed to elect the heads of workshops, sections, shifts and groups when the real power on the shop floor belonged to the enterprise Party organization: 'therefore, this sort of partial democratic election cannot fundamentally arouse workers' enthusiasm for production. And the workers have taken a cool attitude towards this minor reform.'⁹⁷ This dismissal of the right to elect management cadres at certain levels as unimportant shows the gulf between what some Democracy Wall activists were demanding and what was being offered even by the reformists in the top Party leadership. These cadre elections had been billed as 'an important right'⁹⁸ of workers when promoted during 1979, and it was reported at the same time that the restoration of the workers' congress was meeting with considerable cadre resistance at the lower levels⁹⁹, even though the powers of that body were quite limited at the time. So what was derided as not enough by some activists and workers was clearly already too much for the management personnel it affected.

These criticisms of how Chinese industry was run, perhaps more obviously a challenge to the Party than the still politically-charged issues of housing and living standards, were expressed with considerable forcefulness and articulacy

96 Ibid., 148.

97 Lu Min, 'Do away with the administrative power...', reprinted in Widor (ed.) *Documents*, 171. This fits in with the account of the Taiyuan dispute, in which the enterprise Party Committee leadership took charge of dealing with the protesting workers.

98 *Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.79, 3.

99 Ibid., 3.

by many worker-activists who wrote for or edited unofficial journals. But we should not assume that such views were limited to this politically conscious and active minority. Demands for independent unions made during a number of disputes and strikes in 1980-1981 indicate the political content of industrial unrest. In one of the best-documented strikes of the period, the one at the Taiyuan steel works, striking workers

labelling themselves 'the poorest workers in the world', called for 'breaking down the rusted door of socialism', the right to decide their own fate, the end to dictatorship, and the overthrow of the system of political bureaucracy.¹⁰⁰

Given that we know of the occurrence of many other strikes in this period, although in most cases detailed reports are not available, it is unlikely that this was the only case of industrial unrest where workers acting collectively put forward demands which went every bit as far as the criticisms of China's political system being articulated in the unofficial journals. So we can say that to some extent the unofficial journals were, in the words of He Qiu, 'the organs as well as the avant-garde of the democratic movement.'¹⁰¹ They were expressing not only the conclusions of the writers themselves, drawn from their experiences in the Cultural Revolution and under the Gang of Four, but also the views of many in the industrial workforce who were also now going further than before in pinpointing what was wrong with the system which controlled them and how it ought to be changed. The question of to what extent there was active or passive support for Democracy Wall among workers will be dealt with in more detail in the next section.

100 Wilson, 'The Polish lesson', 263.

101 Report to the first meeting of the National Federation of People's Publications, quoted in Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 36.

Workers' support for Democracy Wall

Given that the April Fifth Movement was dominated by young workers, and was most definitely a mass movement¹⁰², it seems surprising that Democracy Wall, at least in its first year or so, did not appear to have a comparable mass base. There were of course strong links between certain activists and groups and the constituencies of rusticated youth demanding a return to the cities, and peasants coming up to the cities to seek redress for injustices perpetrated under the old regime, but the statement still holds true that the initial phase of the movement was not a mass movement in the way that April Fifth was. It has been observed that 'for the time being, the broader social forces of April had withdrawn from active political roles and were ready to entrust the affairs of state to the new Deng government.'¹⁰³ This view suggests that many participants in the April Fifth Movement felt that it had been successful in precipitating the fall of the Gang of Four and ensuring Deng's succession, and were prepared to give the new regime a chance to make good on its promises.

Disenchantment with political activism, in the wake of the Gang's insistence on 'politics in command' and enforced, though ritualistic, participation¹⁰⁴ in endless meetings and

102 At least in Beijing and Nanjing; see Heilmann, 'The social context of mobilization in China', 7.

103 Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 5.

104 Although even such 'administered participation' (Strand, *Political participation and political reform in post-Mao China* (1985), 8) could on occasion be transformed into spontaneous political activity, as in the case, recounted by Heilmann, of the theory group of the Beijing FTU, which although brought together in early 1976 to compile propaganda material against Deng's 'rightist revisionism', ended up writing 'a manifesto attacking the radicals' and defending the reputation of Zhou Enlai

rallies, no doubt also played a part. In addition, regardless of the official tolerance displayed towards Democracy Wall in its early stages, there was still a strong awareness of the risks of participation in such a campaign: after all, had not speaking out against cadres been encouraged by the Party during the Hundred Flowers period, only for many to find themselves on the wrong side of the line later drawn between acceptable and unacceptable criticism? Many of the 'rightists' sent to labour camps in 1957 and 1958 were only rehabilitated (often posthumously) in the late 1970s in the great wave of 'reversals of verdicts' which included participants in the April Fifth Movement and Li Yizhe, so the dangers of taking at face value Party assurances about the desirability of criticism from below would have been recently reinforced in people's minds.

David Strand has argued that the early focus on individual rehabilitation hindered the transition to a movement with mass participation, and that 'in its more obviously collective manifestations ... the movement's turbulence made association with it dangerous.'¹⁰⁵ There is something in this, although we should remember that Democracy Wall was sparked off not by any individual rehabilitation, but by the reversal of verdict on April Fifth, an entire movement involving hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁰⁶ Less open to dispute is the point about popular perceptions of the dangers of being associated with activists who were described in the official press as anarchists, disruptive elements, criminals,

(Heilmann, 'The social context of mobilization in China', 15).

105 David Strand, *Political participation*, 29.

106 On numbers involved, investigated afterwards, and arrested, see Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 80, and 'The social context of mobilization in China', 6-7.

counter-revolutionaries and 'Gang of Four' types¹⁰⁷. Activists did their best to argue that they fully supported the 'unity and stability' which the authorities said their publications and organizations were endangering, insisting that there could be no real unity and stability unless it was founded on democracy and a legal system.¹⁰⁸ But they were up against a very effective barrage of propaganda, and in Guangzhou, although such open condemnation and repression was longer in coming than was the case further north, the charge of illicit contacts with foreigners, i.e. Hong Kong Chinese, could be added to the list.¹⁰⁹

So there are several plausible reasons why mass support proved more difficult to gain and retain for Democracy Wall than for its predecessor, April Fifth. But Wang Xizhe challenged the view that all but a small minority of participants in the April Fifth Movement saw the removal of the Gang as the achievement of their aims, and so withdrew from political debate and action. In 'Strive for the class dictatorship of the proletariat', he argued that:

While the people happily celebrated the October victory [the arrest of the Gang], demands of two types simultaneously arose. A segment of the masses became dissatisfied because they had had none of the spiritual and material means to enable them to

107 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 9.4.79, 1; 18.4.79, 2; 31.5.79, 2; *Renmin Ribao* 8.2.80, 1; 21.2.80, 1 and 4; Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 20; Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 25-6. An article published in *Nanfang Ribao* when the crackdown was already well underway went so far as to bracket 'trouble-makers' who had clashed with the police with rapists and murderers, all of whom had to be dealt with using the 'iron fist' of dictatorship (9.2.80, 2 and 4).

108 See for example 'Democracy and the legal system are safeguards of stability and unity', *Zeren* (16.1.81), translated in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53-4 (1981), 92-3.

109 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 24-5.

recall the Gang of Four directly; they went a step further in their demands for democracy. Another segment of the masses seemed to feel the necessity of discovering anew the 'saviour of the world'. They spread the hope: 'Let's hope that Uncle Deng will live for a few more years'; there are even people who burn incense and pray for him.... these actions ... reveal that the people still feel extremely uncertain as far as controlling their own fate is concerned.¹¹⁰

Here it seems that only some of those involved in protests in 1976 were willing to see Deng's accession to power as the end of the process of attacking bureaucratic rule. Wei Jingsheng argued in similar vein that Deng's regime had to continue to support the just demands of the people and to protect their legitimate interests if it was to keep their trust: 'Do the people support Deng Xiaoping as a person? No, they do not. Without his fight for the people's interests, he himself has nothing worthy of the people's support.'¹¹¹ The comments of both of these writers imply that the 'honeymoon' period for Deng's government might prove to be rather short, especially if Deng's apparent support for, or at least tolerance of, more open political debate came to an end, or if the hoped-for improvement in living standards failed to materialize. In the case of workers, it is true both that standards of living and working conditions for many by 1980 still left a great deal to be desired, and that expectations, fuelled by discussion of

110 Wang Xizhe, 'Strive for the class dictatorship of the proletariat', in Chan, Rosen and Unger (eds.) *On socialist democracy and the Chinese legal system*, 149.

111 Wei Jingsheng, 'Yao minzhu haishi yao xin de ducai? [Do we want democracy or a new dictatorship?]', in *Tansuo*, special edition (25.3.79), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 38 (1979), 31-3; translated in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 45-50, and also in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 196-200. This translation from Seymour, 198.

economic reform, radical proposals for workers' self-management and the publicity given to Solidarity, were extremely high. So clearly there was a reservoir of discontent and pent-up demands among workers which it would be relatively easy for Democracy Wall activists to tap, especially those who were workers themselves. A mass movement once again became a possibility under these conditions.

It is probably true that there was a great deal of passive support and sympathy for the aims of Democracy Wall, as a continuation of April Fifth, among the broad population, especially the urban population. But nevertheless, it was not until 1979 that some activists began to look to sent-down youth or petitioning peasants as a mass base¹¹², and it was not until 1980, when Democracy Wall publications and organizations were already under considerable pressure and some arrests of prominent activists had already been made, that attempts to build up support among workers became significant in the movement. During the earliest weeks and months of the movement, some groups and individuals were addressing their ideas as much to the reformists in the leadership as to the public at large; this is particularly true of groups and individuals whose Party or Communist Youth League membership or family background gave them access to internal Party news sources.¹¹³ It was only later, when the movement's continuation was gravely threatened by arrests and changes to the constitution restricting freedom of expression, that it began trying 'to break out of its isolation and to find new allies outside the fickle elite.'¹¹⁴

We have already mentioned instances of unofficial

112 Benton (ed.), *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 6.

113 See for example Chen Ruoxi's comments on the editorial board of *Beijing zhi Chun* (*Democracy Wall*, 45-47).

114 Benton (ed.), *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 11.

journals and local activists supporting workers in disputes with the management or Party leadership of their enterprise, such as the strike at Taiyuan Iron and Steel, and the way in which Solidarity's initial victory in Poland was welcomed by Democracy Wall activists and widely publicized as an example for China's workers to follow. Events in Poland undoubtedly helped to focus the attention of many activists on the Chinese working class as a possible mass base. The degree of rank-and-file discontent with standards of living, working conditions and enterprise management was already well known, having been covered extensively in the unofficial journals¹¹⁵, and many in the movement were aware of the conditions which had given rise to Solidarity in Poland, and saw clear parallels with China.¹¹⁶

Two years of economic reforms, while successful in some respects, had given rise to some serious problems, notably price inflation, which added to discontent. Shortages of energy and raw materials were also quite severe at this

115 Although earlier in 1980, during the Beida election campaign, Wang Juntao had expressed the view that workers were 'already [the] main beneficiaries' of the reforms ('The wind rises from among the duckweed', in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 92). This is a rather one-sided view, not untypical among intellectuals, of the way in which the reforms had affected workers, concentrating on wage rises and bonuses and neglecting the down-side of housing problems, reduced security, and price increases.

116 For example, the article 'Death knell for the rule of the privileged bureaucratic class' (Qingdao, editorial board of *Lilun Qi*, February 1981, reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53-4 (1981), 35), draws parallels between the corruption and privilege of high officials in the two countries. The Party leadership was equally well aware of possible parallels: see Wilson, 'The Polish lesson', 260-262.

time¹¹⁷, and in these conditions, many industrial enterprises would have had no option but to run at reduced capacity, or even to suspend production altogether for a time. This inevitably leads to hardship for the workforce, who receive only their basic pay with no performance-related bonuses on top. We may recall how in the 1950s it was claimed that some workers' basic pay, without bonuses for over-fulfilment of norms, was not enough to live on, giving rise to great anger among workers when managerial incompetence led to the non-arrival of supplies and the suspension of production, thus threatening their livelihood. There were similar fears again in 1980, by which time bonuses had become a significant proportion of many workers' pay-packets. Bonuses were widely seen as part of workers' basic income, not an optional extra.¹¹⁸

Price rises early in the reform period placed extra strain on workers' household budgets, and were also seen as a threat to workers' security. Later on, in 1989, the fear of inflation outstripping wage increases was a major factor influencing workers to support the Democracy Movement. Similarly, in the early 1990s economic hardship among workers who had been laid-off or put on short-time working was identified by the official unions as a major cause of strikes.¹¹⁹ Clearly there was every reason to expect that discontent among workers would intensify and possibly crystallize into collective protest under conditions like these in the early 1980s. From the point of view of the authorities, Solidarity could hardly have happened at a worse time, and the way in which it was publicized by a Democracy

117 See Nina Halpern, 'Learning from abroad: Chinese views of the East European economic experience, January 1977-June 1981', *Modern China* 11, 1 (January 1985), 79 and 101.

118 See Shirk, 'Recent Chinese labor policies', 586.

119 See for example *Gonghui Xinxu* 21 (1.11.90), 7-10; 6 (15.3.91), 15-16.

Wall Movement now beginning actively to seek mass support among workers made it all the more alarming.

Other developments during 1980 also contributed to a hardening of official attitudes towards Democracy Wall. One such development was the emergence of inter-provincial and national networks of those involved in producing unofficial publications, leading by September 1980 to the establishment of a National Association of People's Publications.¹²⁰ It has been noted that cellular protest, that which is limited to members of a single work-unit (*danwei*), is much easier for the authorities to deal with than any activities which cross unit boundaries.¹²¹ We saw how in the early months of the Cultural Revolution, it was as much the organizational as the ideological dimension of certain Rebel groups which most concerned the authorities. Specifically, federations of school- or work-unit-based groups which crossed geographical or industrial boundaries were perceived as a serious threat, and were among the first organizations to be shut down during the 'February adverse current' of 1967. In later periods of unrest there seems to have been some concern that such contacts might be reactivated, or that new contacts would be made. For example, *chuanlian* (linking up with groups or individuals in other work units, cities or regions to 'exchange revolutionary experiences'), a major feature of the Cultural Revolution in late 1966 in particular, was specifically prohibited during the April Fifth Movement of 1976 on the grounds that it would bring unacceptable disruption to production, but it was reported to have occurred

120 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's democracy movement', 13, 26 and 30. Translations of various articles from the Association's organ, *Zeren*, can be found in *Shiyue Pinglun* 53-4 (1981), 91-93. These include the article 'Democracy and the legal system are safeguards of stability and unity', a scathing response to the attack on the movement published in *Jiefang Ribao* (10.1.81).

121 Heilmann, 'The social context of mobilization in China', 9-10 and 18.

nevertheless.¹²²

In this context, the forging of links with activists and groups in other areas, which the various surviving unofficial publications in Guangzhou had begun to do early in 1980¹²³, appeared to those in positions of power to be a significant escalation of the protests. What was even more worrying was that a similar type of escalation appeared to be taking place among protesting workers. Back in the 1950s, most of the industrial disputes we examined involved workers from a single work-unit only, and the *ad hoc* organizations formed to coordinate activities also stayed within the bounds of a single unit. In the Cultural Revolution, as mentioned above, workers' groups joined federations which crossed work-unit, industrial and geographical boundaries, and these federations bore the brunt of more than one crackdown, being perceived as a particularly dangerous development. In the 1980s, many of the disputes on which we have information were, as in the 1950s, limited to a single unit (although, as in Taiyuan Iron and Steel, this could mean the involvement of as many as three thousand workers).

But some groups of striking workers in the early 1980s were attempting to go a step further organizationally with calls for the establishment of independent unions along the lines of Poland's Solidarity. In the circumstances of the early 1980s, when the suppression of Democracy Wall had already been going on for more than a year and Party authority and control over information had not broken down to the extent it had by 1989, these attempts to form independent unions do not seem to have succeeded for very long. But nevertheless they provided a clear indication that in the future, the authorities would have to deal with not merely spontaneously-formed strike committees and the like, but with autonomous

122 Ibid., 9-10, and note 49.

123 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 13.

organizations of workers with ambitions to make a mark on China similar to that made in Poland by the striking shipyard workers of the Baltic coast. There were even some indications that the new workers' organizations might take on an explicitly political role. One unofficial publication, *Hailanghua* of Qingdao, insisted that Solidarity was a workers' political party in all but name, and that it was only necessary caution which prevented the organization itself from admitting this; it also described the general strike and the organizing of autonomous unions as obviously political acts in their own right.¹²⁴ There was also the case of three Taiyuan printing workers jailed in March 1981 for organizing a 'China Democracy Party'.¹²⁵

So from the official point of view, what was occurring in 1980 was the development of much more threatening organizational forms both by the activists of the Democracy Wall Movement and by discontented and striking workers. The two were perceived as linked, and Democracy Wall activists were in fact blamed for creating disturbances among workers.¹²⁶ One reason for this link being made might have been the common attitude that whenever ordinary, uneducated workers started causing trouble, someone cleverer must be behind the scenes pulling the strings.¹²⁷ The open backing given to striking workers by their local journals contributed to this connection¹²⁸, and as was discussed earlier, there was in fact every reason to suppose that concrete

124 *Hailanghua* 10 (November 1981), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 61 (1982), 20.

125 As reported in *Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 47.

126 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 36.

127 See Goran Leijonhufvud, *Going against the tide: On dissent and big-character posters in China*, 136.

128 In one instance of labour unrest in Wuhan, Democracy Wall activists were reported actually to have led a strike (Benton (ed.), *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 11).

organizational links between the mass of workers and Democracy Wall activists would soon emerge, given the overlap between the concerns of the two group and the worker status of many activists.

The 1980 elections

Workers' support for the Democracy Wall Movement and its activists was manifested in one other way during 1980. The previous year, a new election law had been passed which provided for direct election of representatives to county- and township-level people's congresses, and which allowed for more candidates to stand than positions available, and 'a more open nominating process'¹²⁹ in which candidates no longer had to have the approval of their local Party Committee¹³⁰; any elector could stand if nominated by three others.¹³¹ Many Democracy Wall activists took advantage of this (temporary, as it proved) relaxation of the rules and stood as candidates in local elections in their work-units in a number of Chinese cities. This was far easier to do on university campuses where Party control was more lax and debate was seen as less of a serious threat.¹³² Workers who stood in their units tended to come under rather greater pressure from enterprise authorities, but despite these adverse conditions, a number did stand and won a significant amount of support from their fellow workers.

Of the many Democracy Wall activists and unofficial journal editors from the Guangzhou region, two are known to have stood as candidates in the 1980 elections. One of these,

129 Strand, *Political participation*, 41.

130 Benton (ed.), *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 11.

131 See Munro's introduction to *China: Crossroads socialism*, 12.

132 See Strand, 'Political participation', 42.

Fang Zhiyuan, actually stood in Beijing, in the elections at Beida where he had been a student since 1978.¹³³ While there he acted as the Beijing liaison representative of the Guangzhou journal *Renmin zhi sheng* with which he had been associated at home. During the campaign Fang made the point that public ownership of the means of production did not equal socialism, but that democracy was also necessary, as both a means and an end. He also expressed the view that the Cultural Revolution had been a failed anti-bureaucratic revolution which the reactionary Gang of Four and Lin Biao had tried to use for their own ends. Both these points show the influence of the Li Yizhe poster of 1974, with which Fang, like virtually all Democracy Wall activists from Guangzhou and elsewhere, was familiar.¹³⁴

By all accounts debate during the Beida election campaign was lively and often controversial, with frank discussion of 'such sensitive topics as whether or not China was really a socialist society, whether it sustained a bureaucratic stratum that may already have become a new ruling class, and whether or not China had essentially the same political nature as the Soviet Union.'¹³⁵ Again, the nature of this debate shows quite clearly the Cultural Revolution and early 1970s heritage of Democracy Wall. Another Guangdong candidate in the local elections was Zhong Yueqiu of Shaoguan (north of Guangzhou near the border with Hunan province).¹³⁶ Zhong was a worker in a smelting plant in Shaoguan, and was the editor of two

133 Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 79.

134 On Fang Zhiyuan, see *ibid.*, 79, and 'The wind rises from among the duckweed', first published in the Beijing University journal *Sixu* (Train of Thought) 1, and translated in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 91-93.

135 Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 79.

136 On Zhong Yueqiu, see Munro's introduction to Chen Erjin's *China: Crossroads socialism*, 12; Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 26 and 30.

local unofficial journals, *Shu sheng* (Voice of the Common People) and *Beijiang* (North River). Unfortunately, given the metropolitan bias of much reporting on the movement, and the fact that independent election candidates stood a much better chance of being able to publicize their views and mount a real campaign on a university campus rather than in a factory, very little is known about Zhong's election activities.¹³⁷

One of the best-known cases of worker-activists standing in local elections during 1980 was the candidacy of Fu Shenqi in Shanghai.¹³⁸ The first instance of individuals involved in Democracy Wall putting themselves up for election seems to have occurred in Shanghai in April 1980 at Fudan University and Shanghai Teacher Training College, where a number of students stood for election. This new departure for the movement was reported in the Guangzhou journal *Renmin zhi Sheng*, and when later in the month Fu decided to stand for election in his work unit, he distributed a copy of the Guangzhou article along with a statement of his intention to

137 Chen Ruoxi reports that later in 1980, Zhong attempted to travel to a meeting arranged in Guangzhou which was intended to bring together the editors of those unofficial journals still publishing. The meeting, in late August, was prompted by the imprisonment in July of Liu Qing for publishing Wei Jingsheng's statement in his own defence at his trial. The meeting never occurred, as its organizer, He Qiu, was arrested by the Guangzhou authorities, and Zhong Yueqiu was reportedly turned back at the railway station. A national association was successfully formed in September, but the linking up was done through correspondence rather than face-to-face meeting (Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 30).

138 Fu Shenqi was arrested during the final crackdown on Democracy Wall in the spring of 1981. After his release, he appears to have continued to be politically active in recent movements. At the time of writing, he was serving a three-year prison sentence for protesting about the arrest of independent labour activists in Shanghai, and for speaking to foreign reporters about various cases (*Guardian* 21.2.94, 14).

be a candidate in the election.¹³⁹ He was already well known in the movement in Shanghai as the editor of *Minzhu zhi Sheng* (Voice of Democracy); later on, he was active in the National Federation of People's Publications, and edited the Federation's journal *Zeren* for a time.¹⁴⁰

Fu's candidacy was strongly opposed by the enterprise Party Committee at the engine factory where he worked. Although he went through the required legal procedures in registering himself as a candidate, he eventually had to stand as an unofficial candidate after the leadership refused to recognize his nomination. His complaint to his local Election Committee about this and other instances of interference in his campaign resulted in the Committee branding him a counter-revolutionary and anti-socialist element.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, he was still able to publish a number of statements during his campaign¹⁴², and the day before the election he addressed 500 of his fellow workers, pointing out that China's problems did not just stem from the acts of a few villains like Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, but were systemic, having their roots in China's development of over-centralized government and organization modelled on that of the Soviet Union. 'The solution lay in a thoroughgoing political reform which would transfer the fate of the country from the hands of a privileged minority into the hands of the "legalized popular will".'¹⁴³ Fu's campaign gained a great deal of support from workers in the plant, despite some rather heavy-handed tactics

139 Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 76-77.

140 Ibid., 77-78; Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 27, 32, 54-56.

141 Ibid., 27; Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 77-78.

142 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 27.

143 Fu's statement was reported in *Guanchajia* (September 1980), 29; quoted in Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 77.

on the part of the enterprise Party Committee, which shortly before the election even threatened workers with loss of bonuses and losing promotion if they voted for Fu. He came second in the first round of voting, but was denied the chance to clinch the second of two seats in a run-off election when, contrary to the newly passed Election Law, the authorities simply appointed a candidate to the second post.¹⁴⁴

There were also cases of workers standing for election in Beijing, and as elsewhere, they and their supporters in the workforce were subjected to considerable pressure and harassment on the part of enterprise authorities. This point about interference in elections by basic-level cadres is an important one, since this seems to have been one of the main reasons why cadre elections within enterprises failed to live up to the original promise of real grassroots democracy in electing and recalling at least some levels of management. More will be said about this later in the context of the economic reforms and the promotion of democratic management and the workers' congress.

The election campaigns of two Beijing workers, He Defu and Gong Ping, were reported in *Zeren*, and showed the sort of problems which commonly arose when workers defied enterprise authorities, even when they had the law on their side. He, a worker at the Organic Chemical Factory, and Gong, an oxygen factory worker, prepared a joint manifesto which was fairly typical of the concerns and arguments of Democracy Wall:

The Chinese people suffered for ten long years from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. This was clear proof that because the people did not rule the country or control their own destinies, power fell into the hands of a small minority whose mistakes have cost us dear.... At present the position of

144 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 27.

master and servant are reversed in China. But the people strongly want those that they elect truly to represent them. The role of the people's representatives is to defend and fight for the people's basic interests, and to supervise the policies and measures of the ruling party.... We view this election as a test of the ruling party. Does it believe in the people and stand together with the people? Or does it stand against the people?¹⁴⁵

Their election platform also called for improved standards of living to be made a national priority, and for this commitment to be enshrined in the constitution and included in a wide-ranging programme of socialist modernization.¹⁴⁶ He Defu came a creditable third in the elections, while Gong Ping came fourth in his factory. In his case, however, there was overt interference in the campaign from leading cadres, who 'held "individual discussions" and "greeting sessions" with each voter, so there were many abstentions.'¹⁴⁷ This indicates that the favoured 1950s method for dealing with trouble-makers, 'one-to-one chats', dubbed by discontented workers 'one-to-one threats', was still being practised where workers'

145 Zheng Xing, 'The election movement is in the ascendant', *Zeren* 3 (14.1.81), translated and abridged in Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 101-102. Reference is also made to He Defu and Gong Ping in 'Zhongguo gongren yundong de lishi huigu [A review of the history of the Chinese workers' movement]', *Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 18-19. This article includes quotations from the two workers' manifesto in the original Chinese. Their campaign is also mentioned in Munro's introduction to *China: Crossroads socialism*, where the two are described as both working at the chemical plant and being editors of the unofficial journal *Beijing Qingnian* (Beijing Youth) (Chen Erjin, *China: Crossroads socialism*, 12). The *Zeren* account only lists He as an editor of this journal.

146 Benton (ed.), *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 102.

147 *Ibid.*, 102.

demands for democracy clashed with cadres' desire to maintain their position and quell shop-floor opposition.

In their manifesto, He and Gong noted the general belief in the factory that 'elections are a mere formality and that the representatives will have been secretly chosen in advance', commenting that 'we believe that this was true of previous elections. But now we must resolve that from now on things will be different.'¹⁴⁸ The previous year, shortly before the passing of the new Election Law, an article produced as part of the official reform campaign for limited democratization had made very similar observations, acknowledging that worker scepticism about democratic elections was understandable given that

[I]n previous elections - for positions like people's congress deputies and various kinds of workers' representatives - a list of candidates had been announced by the factory Communist Party committee.... This was often done without the democratic consultation that was supposed to take place first, and voting was a mere formality.¹⁴⁹

Other instances of experimental elections were reported where workers were similarly suspicious of procedures, holding back from participation and saying, 'We'd rather wait and see if the election is going to be carried out in a democratic way or not!'¹⁵⁰ Given these well-founded doubts about the integrity of both internal enterprise elections and external elections to local people's congresses, as well as the sometimes explicit

148 Ibid., 102.

149 Zhi Exiang, 'The election for shop-heads', *China Reconstructs* 28, 5 (May 1979), 6.

150 Tian Sansong, 'Democracy in factories', *Beijing Review* 23, 35 (1.9.80), 24.

threat of reprisals, it is all the more significant that various worker-activists came so close to winning elections during 1980.¹⁵¹ Financial as well as electoral support was also forthcoming from workers in some cases, as in Changsha, where a large amount of money collected by workers funded the campaign of a student candidate who was struggling to keep going in the face of official harassment and opposition.¹⁵² Changsha workers were also reported to have posted big-character posters outside the premises of the local Party Committee in support of student activities.¹⁵³

But this opportunity for Democracy Wall activists to go out and seek mass support for their views was short-lived. As has been mentioned in several of the cases discussed above, local authorities were in a position to disrupt the elections and to prevent the election of candidates considered a threat, and the legal provisions which should have protected the right of such candidates to campaign freely proved to be inadequate. The next round of local people's congress elections, in 1984, were held 'in a far more controlled atmosphere'¹⁵⁴. However, when local elections were held again in 1986 (a few months before the pro-democracy protests of the winter of 1986-7 originating in Hefei, which the conduct of the elections helped to generate) a certain amount of passive resistance to compulsory voting was noted by the former 'rightist' and veteran of many labellings and prison sentences, the Shanghai writer Wang Ruowang. He reported that in one Shanghai district, the first round of the elections was declared void because of the high number of invalid ballot papers. One of the ways in which ballot papers were spoiled was by writing in

151 Some democracy movement candidates actually did win elections, according to Munro (Chen Erjin, *China: Crossroads socialism*, 12).

152 Benton (ed.) *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 11.

153 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 35.

154 Strand, 'Political participation', 42.

such names as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, or the names of characters from popular Chinese novels. Sometimes the names written in were more obviously political: 'At a Mechanical Technical School, the invalid ballots contained the names of Fang Lizhi, Liu Binyan and Wang Ruowang. In other districts, people wrote words which expressed their dissatisfaction openly.' Rather than dispersing after casting their votes, people stayed to hear the results, and reportedly responded with applause and laughter when the names of Fang Lizhi, Mickey Mouse et al were read out. In some factories, however, things were rather more serious, and workers in one plant were forced to vote or have a fine deducted from their wages.¹⁵⁵

The end of Democracy Wall

The suppression of Democracy Wall was a gradual process which began as early as January 1979 and lasted, with greater or lesser severity, for more than two years. January 1979 saw the arrest of Fu Yuehua, and by March the Chinese press was carrying articles denying that the 'foreign' type of human rights protection had anything to offer to a socialist country like China, and attacking a minority who were campaigning for 'extreme democratization' and 'bourgeois democracy'.¹⁵⁶ Wei Jingsheng's arrest on 29 March followed his publication of the essay 'Do we want democracy or a new dictatorship?', in which the measures employed by Deng's regime in dealing with popular protest and political activity were likened to 'the customary methods of fascist dictators old and new'.¹⁵⁷ In a speech on

155 Wang Ruowang, 'Some interesting things which took place at the recent election of deputies to the people's congresses', *Pa Shing Semimonthly* 148 (16.7.87), translated in *Democracy Wall* 3 (n.d.).

156 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 22.3.79, 1.

157 Wei Jingsheng, 'Do we want democracy or a new dictatorship?', special issue of *Tansuo* (25.3.79), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 38 (1979), 32.

30 March, Deng set out the limits of free debate in the shape of the four cardinal principles, 'Party leadership, the socialist path, the dictatorship of the proletariat (now termed "the people's democratic dictatorship"), and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought'¹⁵⁸. New regulations restricting the places where posters could be posted were announced on 1 April, although the original 'Democracy Wall' at Xidan in Beijing was not closed down until December 1979.

Over the next eighteen months publishers of and contributors to unofficial journals were subject to more or less constant pressure from the authorities to cease their activities. The 'four big freedoms' (the freedom to speak out freely, air views fully, hold great debates and write big-character posters) were removed from the constitution in September 1980¹⁵⁹. In response to efforts to closed down unregistered unofficial journals, many groups and individuals switched to publishing in correspondence form, with journals being circulated to subscribers only rather than being on public sale, in an attempt to evade closure. 1980 also saw the beginnings of a national organization linking the surviving journals and activists, as mentioned above. In December 1980, in the wake of Solidarity and its impact on China, Democracy Wall activists were officially branded counter-revolutionaries who were stirring up social unrest and trying to wreck the economic reforms. A mass campaign against the 'two illegals' (illegal publications and organizations) was launched in all work units with the promulgation of CCP Document No.9 in February 1981, and this heralded the final round of arrests and closures of unofficial journals, with the last issue of *Zeren*, published in June 1981, being the last such publication to find its way out to Hong Kong.¹⁶⁰

158 Munro, 'China's Democracy Movement', 75.

159 Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall*, 27.

160 Ibid., 36-38.

In Guangzhou, as was mentioned earlier, the pressure on the movement was initially somewhat more subtle than was the case in most other cities, which is why the south became the centre of the movement from about the middle of 1980. In its early stages, the city was even described by some as a 'liberated area' for the democracy movement, and Wang Xizhe confirmed that this was an accurate description as of autumn 1979.¹⁶¹ There are a number of explanations for this relative tolerance of the movement in Guangzhou. One reason might be the city's proximity to Hong Kong, which meant that news of a harshly repressive reaction would quickly find its way to the outside world, harming the country's image at a time when the 'Open Door' policy of attracting foreign technology and investment was just getting off the ground. In addition, the movement could be useful to the authorities as a testing-ground for new ideas; we have already noted the protests of activists at being labelled anti-Party, when so many ideas first aired in the unofficial journals had actually been taken up by the CCP later on.¹⁶² There is also the point that the movement seems to have been comparatively weak initially and to have developed more slowly in Guangzhou than in other cities¹⁶³, and thus it probably seemed a less serious threat.

Stanley Rosen has pointed out that student journal editors were more susceptible to official pressure to stop publishing, since their activities were a heavy drain on both their finances and their study time, and since they were aware that obstinacy in the face of official disapproval might

161 Interview with Wang Xizhe first published in *Le Monde* in October 1979; reprinted in the *Monthly Bulletin of the Chinese Democratic Movement*, 1, 8 (November 1981), and in *Shiyue Pinglun* 27 (1981), 11.

162 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', cites both of these reasons (2-3).

163 See the Wang Xizhe interview, *Shiyue Pinglun* 57 (1981), 11-12.

affect their employment assignments after graduation. The student-edited journal *Weilai* (Future) was the first to cease publication voluntarily in Guangzhou, after provincial First Secretary Xi Zhongxun suggested that it was unhelpful of the journal to dwell on the admittedly important issue of the masses' low standard of living at a time when the CCP was already working hard to solve the problem, undoing the damage of previous errors committed by the likes of the Gang of Four.¹⁶⁴ Workers such as He Qiu and Liu Guokai were less likely to respond in the desired way to being leaned on in this fashion, although as Rosen notes, for this very reason they were sometimes singled out for different treatment.¹⁶⁵

In 1980, as in 1989, activists came up against the problem of registering a publication or an organization with the authorities in order to keep their activities legal. The Guangzhou journal *Renmin zhi Sheng* suspended publication in the spring of 1980 after being told by the Propaganda Department of the provincial Party Committee that the journal had to comply with the 1952 'Temporary (sic) Law on the Registration of Publications', since this law was actually still in force. Both *Renmin zhi Sheng* and its offshoot *Renmin zhi Lu* protested that they had tried much earlier to register with the authorities, but to no avail, and that it was unreasonable to expect them to comply with such an out-of-date law. The particular measure to which they objected was that the publications had to obtain the legal guarantee of two privately-owned shops before they could be registered. This might not have been a particularly onerous requirement in 1952, but in 1980, as the editorial board of *Renmin zhi sheng* pointed out, 'since the [socialist] transformation of commerce was completed as early as 1956, after which private shops ceased to exist, it is now a complete impossibility for us to

164 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 16.

165 Ibid., 18.

go out and obtain the guarantee of two shop-owners.'¹⁶⁶ Similarly, in May 1989 Beijing's *Gongzilian* was refused registration by the Public Security Bureau when it tried to achieve legal status, and then condemned as an illegal organization.¹⁶⁷

Spring 1981 saw a campaign in the official press to refute the main arguments of Democracy Wall, and to prepare the way for the CCP's definitive verdict on the Cultural Revolution and on Mao's leadership. A series of articles denied that any bureaucratic class or privileged stratum existed in China, and accused those who claimed to be attacking this new class of Cultural Revolution-style anarchism and of attempting to overthrow the Party and the socialist system. It was denied that the Party or the state appropriated the fruits of others' labour in an exploitative way, and, in the CCP's defence, its consistent opposition to bureaucratism and its many campaigns to eradicate the problem were highlighted, without, however, any reference to the very limited progress which such major campaigns as the Three Anti had actually made.¹⁶⁸ The document containing the official appraisal of Mao and the Cultural Revolution, the 'Decision on certain questions in Party history' adopted by the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee on 29 June 1981, had been under discussion for a year before it was finalized and had gone through numerous revisions, mainly, it seems, to make

166 'Fanminzhu niliu xia de kongsu [Condemned under the anti-democratic adverse current]', reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 46 (1980), 12. See also Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 18-19.

167 Walder and Gong, 'Workers in the Tiananmen protests', 7.

168 See for example *Jiefangjun Bao* 9.2.81, in *FBIS* 10.2.81, L1-3; 'Ping suowei fandui guanliao zhuyizhe jieji [Criticize the so-called opposition to the bureaucratic class]', *Hongqi* 1.3.81, 12-18, in *FBIS* 31.3.81, L1-8; *Nanfang Ribao* 2.4.81, 1 and 3.

it less critical of Mao.¹⁶⁹ Its formal adoption, and the show trial of the Gang of Four which ended early in 1981, marked a turning point in the high-level power struggle following Mao's death which was significant for the Democracy Wall Movement.¹⁷⁰ The movement no longer served any useful purpose for Deng and his supporters in the top leadership once these questions had been decided in their favour, and so the final round of arrests could begin.

Given this context, the trial of the Gang and the verdict that the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao had been an unqualified disaster for China, it should not surprise us to find Democracy Wall activists being linked with Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, and activists' attacks on bureaucratism and privilege being denounced as calls for a 'second Cultural Revolution'.¹⁷¹ Once again, former Rebels were 'turned ... from victims of Lin Biao, Mao and the Gang of Four into the Gang's so-called running dogs', ignoring the fact that 'the rank and file members of the Rebel Faction had no connection with the Gang of Four or its clique. In fact, former Rebels like the Li Yizhe group took dangerous risks by criticizing the Gang's radical policies.'¹⁷² What is perhaps more surprising is to find the same line being taken eight years later against worker-activists in the 1989 Democracy Movement, when members of Gongzilian and other workers' groups were

169 Roderick MacFarquhar argues that Deng's main concern was that his important PLA constituency would be hostile to a decision which dwelt too much on Mao's faults and mistakes (*The politics of China, 1949-1989*, 329-330).

170 Gregor Benton has pointed out the significance of the Gang's trial in this context in his introduction to *Wild lilies, poisonous weeds*, 12-13.

171 *Jiefangjun Bao* 9.2.81, in *FBIS* 10.2.81, L1-3; *Hongqi* 1.3.81, 12-18, in *FBIS* 31.3.81, L1-8.

172 Anita Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions about the Red Guard movement', *Journal of Contemporary China* 1, 1 (September 1992), 72-73.

compared to the Gang of Four¹⁷³, and were actually labelled 'sinister remnants of the Gang of Four' by the ACFTU¹⁷⁴.

The April Fifth Movement, Democracy Wall, and mass protest: Conclusions

Given what we know about the origins and course of the 1989 Democracy Movement, hindsight poses the question of why in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the politically active minority failed to link up with the dissatisfied (urban) majority to form a powerful mass movement. The answer seems to lie in the exact political context and sequence of events between 1976 and 1981, where there seems to have been a chronological mismatch between spontaneous mass political activity and a sustained campaign of criticism of, and sometimes opposition to, CCP rule. The April Fifth movement, as has already been observed, could be counted a genuine mass movement, at least in the several cities where very large numbers were involved in street protests and demonstrations.¹⁷⁵ But following the Tiananmen Incident the movement was suppressed, and in Beijing in particular this involved a large number of arrests and executions. Despite signs of continued support for the views expressed in the movement (for example, the widespread popular refusal to hand

173 See for example the articles in *Gongren Ribao* 28.6.89, 3.

174 Quoted in Lu Min (ed.), *Gongren qilaile*, 16 (16). Since there are both English and Chinese versions of this book available, I will henceforth quote from the Chinese version, but will also give in brackets the equivalent page reference for the English translation (titled *A moment of truth*).

175 Heilmann lists Hangzhou, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Luoyang, and Taiyuan as places where participants numbered in the tens of thousands, but points out that only 21 work units were said to have been active in the Kaifeng protests, compared with two thousand in Beijing and more than a thousand in Nanjing ('The social context of mobilization in China', 7).

over copies of posters etc. as evidence after the suppression of the movement, and the clandestine and then open circulation of material from the movement¹⁷⁶), there was not time for autonomous organizations to emerge as they did in 1989.

Once the Gang had been deposed in October 1976, other factors inhibiting political activism came into play. As was discussed earlier, there was a disenchantment with politics among those who had been subjected to endless meetings and newspaper editorials full of mind-numbing jargon in the mid-1970s, as well as a feeling among some that with the Gang under arrest, the movement had already achieved its main goal. Many people were prepared to put their trust in the Deng regime and to allow it a chance to improve living standards, as had been promised; and despite the problems of price inflation and reform threats to job security, many people did begin to experience an improvement in their standard of living during the early 1980s. In addition, there was still a considerable amount of risk attached to associating oneself with a non-Party political campaign. Although the late 1970s saw the rehabilitation of large numbers of those who had fallen victim to earlier purges and mass campaigns, this did not mean that the traffic was all one-way in the Chinese penal system. In fact, the Li Yizhe group in Guangzhou were among those arrested after the Gang's fall, during a period of 'increased suppression of political dissidents'¹⁷⁷. So the Democracy Wall activists would have to deal with a legacy of fear of, as well as cynicism about, political participation when they came to see the necessity of garnering mass support.

By 1980, however, there were a number of factors which could have worked in favour of the Democracy Wall activists as they began actively seeking popular backing. There were the

176 Heilmann, *Nanking 1976*, 84-85.

177 Rosen, 'Guangzhou's Democracy Movement', 6. See also Mab Huang and James Seymour's introduction to *The fifth modernization*, 8.

local elections in which a number of activists were able to stand, gaining a great deal of publicity for the movement and enjoying some electoral success despite official harassment and intimidation of them and their supporters. There was also a groundswell of industrial unrest, and in some cases striking or protesting workers were already making political demands. The background of discontent among workers made them a natural ally of the young worker-activists of the unofficial publications movement, and this became all the more obvious to both sides once the example of Solidarity in Poland began to be widely publicized in China.

But conversely, it was probably organizational developments and the danger of the political movement linking up with protesting workers that prompted the final suppression of Democracy Wall early in 1981; the example of Poland was not lost on the authorities, either. In the months after Democracy Wall had come to an end, workers were to some extent temporarily bought off, as the economic problems of the early reform period seemed to ease and industrial incomes generally rose. But underlying grievances about security, distribution, representation and democratic management were still present, ready to come to the fore again as the economic situation worsened and Party legitimacy waned further towards the end of the 1980s. This accounts for the rapid emergence of politicized, autonomous workers' organizations during the 1989 Democracy Movement.

So although there was no Chinese Solidarity in the early 1980s, and although Democracy Wall was eventually suppressed, the underlying problems in the relationship between worker 'masters' and their 'humble servants' in Party and administrative posts had not been resolved. Thus in the early 1980s, if the economic reforms were to be successful, the manifest alienation of so many workers from the management and Party leadership of their enterprises had to be tackled, and if the 1980-1981 outbreaks of union self-organization a la

Solidarity were not to be repeated, measures had to be adopted to revitalize workers' participation in management, to relegitimize the official unions as representatives and defenders of workers' interests and channels for dealing with grievances, and to give the 'masters of the enterprise' a real stake in their workplaces.

This was what the reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s set out to do, and the language in which the reforms were discussed, as well as the actual measures proposed, shows quite clearly that some sort of dialogue was going on between Democracy Wall and those officials who favoured reform. Some of the early proposals for reforming industrial organization, especially those concerned with the role of the workers' congress, were quite radical, and the next section will demonstrate that this would not have been the case without the very strong influence both of Democracy Wall, and of protesting workers who had shown themselves to be prepared, in the face of management intransigence, to go outside authorized channels in order to press demands they considered to be legitimate.

Democratic management and the economic reforms

That there was, at least in the early stages, a considerable degree of overlap between the demands of the Democracy Wall mainstream and the proposals of the 'reformists' in the Party and government is shown by some of the earliest statements on the purpose and nature of the reforms in enterprise management. In the same speech in which he had insisted that the official unions still had a role to play, Deng also called for democratic management as an essential part of the successful implementation of reform. Democratization of management was to be achieved by means of the revitalized workers' congress (usually with the trade union committee as its working body), which in addition to its

usual remit of supervision, discussion and criticism would also organise the election of workshop, section and group leaders within the enterprise. Addressing some of the main concerns of Democracy Wall activists, Deng argued that an extension of the role of the workers' congress was needed in order to tackle the 'overconcentration of power within the Party and the state and the undesirable consequences stemming from this (such as bureaucratism, organizational rigidity, paternalism, extensive privileges, and the life-tenure [cadre] employment system.'¹⁷⁸

Similarly, the Democracy Wall debate on the realities of public ownership in China had its counterpart in official circles. We have already seen claims in some unofficial journals that 'ownership by the whole people' had over time turned into control, if not actual ownership, of the means of production by a minority of cadres, who thus came to be living on the fruits of others' labour. But it is perhaps more surprising to come across this type of argument in the pages of the English-language Party-controlled periodical *Beijing Review*:

In some places and units where democratic life is lacking and a patriarchal system is in effect, the rights to manage an enterprise and to distribute its products are in fact in the hands of the Party secretary and the factory director....[Workers' congresses] are nothing but rubber-stamp organizations without real power....socialist public ownership is, to say the least, far from complete or even devoid of content.¹⁷⁹

The date of this article, December 1980, is significant, as

178 Peter Nan-shong Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 138.

179 *Beijing Review* 23, 52 (29.12.80), 16.

this places it at the height of the official panic about Solidarity and Chinese protest and industrial unrest, about which more will be said below.

The extent to which management democratization was an end in itself in the post-Mao period, or merely instrumental in the overall reform programme, is open to debate. Many see promotion of the workers' congress as simply a means to an end, necessary for the support one of the main policies of that programme: increased enterprise autonomy. If decentralization of some powers to the enterprise was to be successful, it was essential to have technically competent management who enjoyed a certain amount of support and legitimacy in the workplace. Put at its simplest, it was thought that giving enterprises, for example, more scope for retaining profits to be distributed in the form of bonuses for productivity and fulfilment of quotas would give workers an incentive to elect the most competent personnel to run the enterprise, since inefficient management would have a direct and adverse effect on workers' pockets. This view sees the workers' congress as a by-product of the reform process mainly used 'to buttress enterprise autonomy'¹⁸⁰.

In a slightly broader sense, there was a concern that the extent of worker alienation from both management and the official unions could not but have an effect on efficiency and productivity, making enterprise democratization a vital part of the reform effort. Furthermore, if we take into account the impact of Democracy Wall, the possibility emerges that democratization, in the workplace and elsewhere, was important in itself as a means of diverting popular demands for democratic participation back into officially-sanctioned channels, as well as being a prop of the reforms. What gave impetus to enterprise democratization, in this view, were

180 Hong and Lansbury, 'The workers' congress in Chinese enterprises,' in Warner (ed.) *Management Reforms in China*, 152.

'reasons of management effectiveness and others relating to pressures for democracy ... including the unofficial "democracy movement"'¹⁸¹. Besides accepting the enterprise autonomy argument, Peter Nan-shong Lee goes further in crediting Deng with the promotion of industrial democracy in a different (institutional rather than mobilizational) form from that practised by Mao, but stemming from the same 'deep intellectual roots in Marxism.'¹⁸² However, if industrial democracy was in fact desirable in itself to the top leadership, it was certainly a subordinate goal to that of improving economic performance and maintaining 'unity and stability'. Otherwise, it is difficult to see why a new era of democratic management in Chinese enterprises did not in fact emerge during the reforms of the early 1980s.

The workers' congress

The workers' congress is an interesting case in point for the purposes of this study for two main reasons. Firstly, it shows the extent to which the reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s harked back to the 1950s and early 1960s for their inspiration, reinforcing the parallel between the two periods noted in the introduction to this section. Secondly, the influence on the Chinese reforms of the changing nature of the Democracy Wall Movement and of events in Eastern Europe emerges very clearly from an examination of various statements on the purpose and powers of the workers' congress between 1979 and 1981. In the process of developing a workers' congress for the post-Mao era, a process which began with

181 Lockett, 'Enterprise Management - Moves Towards Democracy?', 232.

182 Peter Nan-shong Lee, *Industrial management and economic reform*, 140. For an alternative view on Deng's acquaintance with the intellectual roots of Marxism, see Meisner, 'Marx, Mao, and Deng on the division of labor in history', in Meisner and Dirlik (eds.) *Marxism and the Chinese experience*, 107.

experimentation with radical reforms but ended in a return to the formalism and disillusionment of the mid-1950s, we can see how the demands of Democracy Wall activists and some workers gradually diverged from what enterprise and Party leaders were prepared to concede, until the gulf between them became unbridgeable. This of course ultimately led workers to look for other ways of asserting their right to a greater degree of control over their working lives, in the shape of autonomous organizations with a political as well as an industrial remit.

The workers' congress began to be promoted again from 1978, but the Provisional Regulations governing its operations were not published until July 1981, and were not made permanent until 1984. This left a relatively long period of time when practice varied widely in different enterprises and in different parts of the country. There was a great deal of experimentation, and much discussion in the national, local and specialist trade union press of how the pitfalls of the workers' congress system of the 1950s might be avoided this time around. At times proposals were made which, if implemented, would have made the workers' congress a genuinely powerful body in the enterprise, not just within its traditional remit of welfare and bonuses but in the making of all major decisions. Such proposals 'gave rise to some speculation that China was about to embark on a more active form of worker participation than had occurred in the past.'¹⁸³ But it should be noted that this speculation was limited to outside observers, while workers, and also many trade union cadres, were initially quite suspicious of the proposals and doubted that they could be made to work in their own enterprises, suspicions that were not entirely groundless in view of the ineffectiveness of past attempts to promote participation and democratization.

183 Henley and Nyaw, 'The development of work incentives in Chinese industrial enterprises - material versus non-material incentives', in Warner (ed.) *Management Reforms in China*, 144.

Official interest in applying the Yugoslavian example of decentralized workers' self-management was taken by some outside observers as a sign that the Chinese authorities' commitment to the democratization of management might be genuine. As was mentioned above, many Democracy Wall activists such as Wang Xizhe spoke approvingly of the Yugoslav system¹⁸⁴ (apparently unaware of its actual limitations), and some official sources disseminated a similarly rosy view of the self-management system. But Nina Halpern has identified Chinese praise for this and other aspects of East European practice as being prompted primarily not by any perceived appropriateness of Yugoslavia as a model for China, but by foreign policy concerns (this was also the case with Romania).¹⁸⁵ Thus articles on the Yugoslav economy seem mainly to have been intended to provide evidence (from a partial, overly positive picture) of the likely success of policies the Chinese leadership had already put into practice, or had decided to adopt. It seems likely, then, that favourable references to Yugoslav-style 'workers' self-management' were merely being used to bolster official promotion of the workers' congress in China, and did not necessarily imply any radical departure from past Chinese practice.

Looking at articles on enterprise reform and democratization, and particularly at those on the workers' congress, from the period 1979 to 1981, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the demands of Democracy Wall and the emergence of Solidarity had a major impact on policy in the

184 See for example *Guanchajia* 23 (September 1979), 4-6. See also Han Zhixiong, 'On democracy in economic management and political democracy', *Beijing zhi Chun* 2 (27.1.79) 1-2, translated and abridged in Seymour (ed.) *The fifth modernization*, 162.

185 Halpern, 'Learning from abroad: Chinese views of the East European economic experience, January 1977-June 1981', *Modern China* 11, 1 (January 1985), 77-109, especially pages 98-101.

second half of 1980. The change in the tone and content of the discussion from about September 1980 is quite striking, and the most likely explanation for this change is that it was part of the official reaction both to the rise of Solidarity and to the welcome it received from Democracy Wall activists and restive workers in China.

This is not to say that there was no impulse for reform and democratization from the top leadership prior to the appearance of Solidarity in Poland. There was; as was noted above, as early as 1978 in his speech to the Ninth ACFTU Congress, Deng had called for all enterprises to be democratically managed (though still under unified Party leadership). The need to extend the powers of the workers' congress was discussed in a *Renmin Ribao* article in March 1980; the article also suggested that elections for factory directors were a necessary reform.¹⁸⁶ Further evidence is provided by Liao Gailong's report on 'The "1980 Reform" Programme of China'¹⁸⁷, which discusses democratization and trade union reform at length. The editorial note accompanying the version of the report printed in *Qishi Niandai* reveals that much of the content of the report had already been discussed by the Party centre in July, and had been set out in a speech by Deng Xiaoping at a Politburo meeting on 18 August 1980, four days after the sit-in at the Lenin Shipyard began and on the day when the strike was first reported in the Chinese press. However, the final October version of Liao's report makes specific reference to the 'Polish crisis', suggesting that the Chinese working class, too, was likely to 'rise in rebellion' unless workers were 'allowed to enjoy freedom and democracy in electing their own trade union leaders' who would provide genuine representation of workers'

186 *Renmin Ribao* 6.3.80; excerpts translated in *SWB-FE* 6403/BII (24.4.80), 6-8.

187 *Qishi Niandai* 134 (1.3.81), translated in *FBIS* 16.3.81, U1-2.

interests.¹⁸⁸

This explicit later reference to events in Poland supports the view that pressure for real concessions on enterprise democratization and worker representation in China greatly intensified as the nature and dimensions of the Polish uprising became clear, although support for reforms in this direction had existed in the top Party leadership before August 1980. As the culmination of the decision-making process, the establishment of workers' congresses in all enterprises and the promotion of democratic management was endorsed at the Third Plenum of the Fifth National People's Congress in September 1980, and several articles on the workers' congress in subsequent months made reference to this decision¹⁸⁹. But even a high-level decision such as this does not fully account for the appearance in the official press of articles linking enterprise democracy through the workers' congress with wider socialist democracy¹⁹⁰, and calling for workers to exercise real power in the enterprise as a prerequisite to taking over the management of state political, social and economic affairs.¹⁹¹

This promotion of greater democratic rights for workers, for a short time, went far beyond anything which had been proposed even at the height of the Hundred Flowers period; it was unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic. This quite sudden departure from previous language and practice cannot have been simply another part of the programme being promoted by the reformists within the Party apparatus. It occurred at a time when the Party was greatly concerned about the activities of Democracy Wall activists, especially

188 Ibid., U11.

189 See for example *Gongren Ribao* 21.10.80, 1; *Nanfang Ribao* 22.10.80, 3.

190 *Nanfang Ribao* 22.10.80, 3; 29.11.80, 2.

191 *Gongren Ribao* 21.10.80, 1.

those who had stood in local people's congress elections, and was within months of the final suppression of that movement, the trial of the Gang of Four, and the final Party verdict on Mao's historical legacy; the Party was voicing concerns about 'extreme democratization' and the threat this posed to hard-won unity and stability. In other words, this was not a time when radical new policy initiatives in the direction of greater democracy in enterprises would normally have been on the agenda. So the explanation for this sudden display of commitment to workers' role as masters of the enterprise and the state must lie in external pressures on the authorities, namely Democracy Wall and Solidarity.

The shift in attitudes regarding democratic management and workers' proper role can be discerned in *Nanfang Ribao's* coverage of the enterprise reform debate. Up until September 1980, articles on economic reform had all focused on enterprise autonomy and ways of loosening the bureaucratic controls on factory directors. Guangdong was of course in the vanguard of the early economic reforms, and the many articles centred on efficiency, decentralization, contracting out, management's right to manage etc. were in keeping with the region's reputation for placing enthusiasm for rapid economic reform above political dogma about the nature of the socialist enterprise. Typical of the tone of pre-Solidarity reports on enterprise reform are a number of pieces from the spring and early summer of 1980 which were mainly concerned with such subjects as increasing enterprise profit through greater autonomy, competition between enterprises, and the use of individual economic incentives to motivate workers.¹⁹²

But the tone and content of articles on enterprise reform changes quite abruptly after the month of August. As was noted above, moves were afoot at the Party centre for democratization in any case, but it is hard to believe that

¹⁹² See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 21.3.80, 1; 25.4.80, 1; 21.5.80, 2; and 28.6.80, 1, 4.

the radicalism and forthright language of some of the proposals that were made in the autumn and winter of 1980 represented a spontaneous restatement of commitment to workers' role as masters of the enterprise, rather than being prompted by fear of Democracy Wall linking up with large numbers of disgruntled workers to create a 'Polish crisis' in China. In the first half of the year, *Nanfang Ribao* had hardly mentioned workers in its discussions of economic reform; the few references to workers mainly concerned the claimed success of the system of individual bonuses in motivating workers to work harder. But in the autumn and winter, a number of articles appeared stressing that all power devolved to the lower level had to be in the hands of the workers, who should run factories, and in time the state itself, themselves. A different attitude towards workers is apparent, too: references to indiscipline and the lingering influence of the Gang of Four disappeared (temporarily), and workers were portrayed instead as reasonable and responsible people who could be trusted with power. By the end of November, *Nanfang Ribao* was posing the question, 'To whom does power in the enterprise belong?', and answering itself, 'In a socialist society, it should undoubtedly belong to the broad mass of workers and staff.' The same article went on to describe the workers' congress as a mere 'democratic ornament' in the past, ignored or treated as a rubber stamp by the Party Committee and management, and noted that the proper relationship between 'humble servants' (cadres) and 'masters' (workers) had for a long time been transposed.¹⁹³ Much of this line of argument could have been lifted straight out of one of Guangzhou's unofficial publications of the time.

It is very noticeable that in this period, official sources to a large extent admitted the shortcomings of the workers' congress as it had previously been constituted in enterprises, noting that recent experiments had finally given

193 *Nanfang Ribao* 29.11.80, 2.

democratic management 'genuine content'¹⁹⁴. The influence of Democracy Wall, the extent to which official sources accepted its arguments and its agenda, is apparent in praise for experimental enterprises where workers, through the workers' congress, now had 'a genuine right to speak ... the right to be consulted and to decide on important matters ... [and] the right to distribute a part of the fruits of their own labour.' The same article reported that these enterprises had turned over some of the work of recruitment and allocation of jobs within the enterprise to the workers' congress, to make it more difficult for cadres to make 'back-door' appointments and practise favouritism¹⁹⁵. This is another example of the reforms addressing specific grievances aired in the unofficial Democracy Wall journals.

Various measures were proposed, and in some cases tried out, for preventing the new, 1980s system of democratic management based on the workers' congress from degenerating into formalism as it had in the past. *Gongren Ribao*, not surprisingly, was the most outspoken about past problems, calling for China's enterprises to be made socialist in fact as well as in name, and arguing that public ownership was only a necessary condition for workers' becoming the masters of the enterprise, not a sufficient one. Exactly the same argument was of course used by the Qingdao unofficial journal *Hailanghua* in August 1980¹⁹⁶, showing again the way in which quite radical ideas first expressed in Democracy Wall writings, and condemned by the authorities, could later on crop up as acceptable components of reform policy.

194 *Nanfang Ribao* 5.10.80, 1. An article published the following month makes very similar points about how the workers' congress should exercise any powers devolved to the enterprise from higher levels, in contrast to its rubber-stamp role in the past (*Nanfang Ribao* 23.11.80, 1).

195 *Nanfang Ribao* 5.10.80, 1.

196 *Hailanghua* 7 (26.8.80), reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 60 (1981), 34.

The workers' congress in the 1980s

Given the similarities between the two periods (workers' alienation from official unions, increasing dissent in the form of stoppages and strikes and concern over the lack of democracy and participation within enterprises), it should come as no surprise that when management democratization returned to the agenda in the 1980s, 'the approach adopted was to a large degree a return to the policies of the mid-1950s',¹⁹⁷. One article in 1980 actually used the same form of words as Lai Ruoyu had in 1956, asserting that 'democratic management is one of the signs that distinguishes socialist enterprises from capitalist enterprises.'¹⁹⁸ Yet, as was mentioned earlier, there was an awareness that the 1950s system of workers' congresses had failed to establish institutional safeguards of workers' right to participate in management which could not easily be circumvented by cadres. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, then, a number of proposals were made, many by the official trade unions, which were intended to make the workers' congress a body with real authority in the enterprise.

In an attempt to ensure that workers' congresses were not once again dominated by cadres and more skilled workers, it was stipulated that 60% of congress representatives should be shop-floor workers¹⁹⁹ rather than cadres, technicians or union representatives. In one experimental enterprise, the Guangzhou No.1 Cotton Mill, rank-and-file workers were also reported to constitute 60% of the congress's standing body, the presidium. Since it was this body which was responsible

197 Lockett, 'Enterprise management - Moves towards democracy?', 233.

198 *Renmin Ribao* 6.3.80, excerpts translated in *SWB/FE* 6403/B2 (24.4.80), 7.

199 *Beijing Review* 23, 35 (1.9.80), 22.

for overseeing the implementation of congress decisions, and for taking decisions when the congress was not in session, ensuring a shop-floor majority on the presidium could be said to be even more important than making sure that a majority of congress representatives were workers. In the past, it was reported, workers had constituted only 10% of the presidium, and so could easily have been overruled by the body's cadre members.²⁰⁰ The report on this enterprise took a similar line to many others at the time in criticizing the efficacy of the workers' congress in the past. Before the reforms, the workers' congress was said to have met only twice a year, and to have been nothing more than a forum where the factory director made a report, the Party Secretary gave instructions, and the workers pledged their support.²⁰¹ This description of the role of the workers' congress is of course familiar to us from press reports of the mid-1950s and 1960s.

When the Temporary Regulations for workers' congresses were published in mid-1981, it was stipulated that ordinary workers should form a majority of the congress and of its standing body. However, this was a much less significant concession than it might seem, because in the Temporary Regulations, almost all of the new powers experimentally granted to the workers' congress were downgraded from the power to take decisions itself to the right to be consulted over decisions and to ratify some of them.²⁰² It must be remembered that the Guangzhou No.1 Cotton Mill was an experimental enterprise, and that most of the city's enterprises would not have introduced the 60% rule in any case. In addition, even in this plant which was being allowed to go much further than others in experiments with management democratization, no cadre elections had been held, even though the right to elect and recall cadres was supposed to be one of

200 *Nanfang Ribao* 23.11.80, 1.

201 *Nanfang Ribao* 23.11.80, 1.

202 *Renmin Ribao* 20.7.81, 1.

the most important innovations of the 1980s. More will be said about the importance of cadre elections later.

There were also proposals to make the congress the policy-making body of the enterprise while the Party Committee concentrated on wider issues of ideology and political education²⁰³. The Party Committee of the Foshan No.5 Plastics Plant was criticized in the autumn of 1980 for going beyond its proper role of ideological and political leadership and for trying to limit the workers' congress to discussion and implementation of decisions after they had been taken by the enterprise leadership.²⁰⁴ The leadership was rebuked for having refused workers permission even to convene the workers' congress to discuss a possible merger with another enterprise, and was reminded that the Party was not an administrative organ, and that the authoritative structure within the scope of enterprise autonomy was the workers' congress.²⁰⁵ It was also reported from another Guangdong enterprise that the Party Committee there was passing important matters over to the workers' congress for discussion and decision, including production and financial plans, the use of retained profits to construct workers' housing, the recruitment of new employees by public examinations, and the establishment, amendment and removal of regulations and systems. It was emphasized that workers' congress must be involved in implementing the increased powers available under enterprise autonomy, and that there was no contradiction between this and the Party's leading political role.²⁰⁶

In some experimental enterprises new standing organizations were set up with the remit of ensuring the

203 Lockett, 'Enterprise management - Moves towards democracy?', 246.

204 *Nanfang Ribao* 29.11.80, 2.

205 *Nanfang Ribao* 29.11.80, 2.

206 *Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.80, 1.

timely implementation by cadres of decisions of the workers' congress. These bodies were given the powers to enforce cadre compliance with congress decisions, and it was further stated that no regulation or system set up by decision of the workers' congress could be overturned except by another congress resolution, in contrast to past practice.²⁰⁷ In addition to various groups set up expressly to oversee implementation of congress decisions, the enterprise trade union still played a part, and the workers' congress was also convened more often than in the past, twice a quarter in the case of one experimental enterprise.²⁰⁸ However, as was the case with the built-in workers' majority on the congress presidium, these innovations became much less significant once the Temporary Regulations reduced the congress's powers to the right to be consulted about important decisions in the enterprise. Ultimately the workers' congress was left with the power of decision only within its traditional remit of safety, welfare and some decisions on pay and bonuses. This meant that its power to exert influence within the enterprise was not significantly greater than it had been in the 1950s. It seems that in spite of some early over-optimistic assessments of its significance, the best that can be said of the 1980s version of the workers' congress is that could provide

a consultative forum that imposes limited obligations on top management. Like most representative bodies in capitalist economies, congresses tend to be dominated by more skilled workers and supervisors....since the Party secretary is the final arbiter in disputes with management,

207 *Nanfang Ribao* 29.11.80, 2; 8.11.80, 1.

208 *Nanfang Ribao* 29.11.80, 2.

his influence tends to be pervasive.²⁰⁹

Some observers considered that workers' congresses could still offer 'some scope for meaningful participation beyond the mere "formalism" of the past',²¹⁰ but in many enterprises this was not the case, and possibilities for genuine participation still depended on the attitudes of management rather than on the institutionalization of workers' rights. As in the 1950s, the one management reform measure on which all others ultimately depended for their efficacy was the holding of direct elections in enterprises, elections not only of workers' congress and trade union representatives, but also of group, section and workshop heads, and even of factory directors. Unless workers could affect the career prospects of their managers in some way they would be unable to exert any real authority in the workplace. Cadres with life tenure and no threat of losing their position in an election would be able to go on disregarding the proceedings of bodies like the workers' congress, so that the organization's reputation among the workers would become tarnished and they too would cease to expect anything of it. This was the chain of events in the 1950s; the next section will look in detail at the theory and practice of workplace elections in the 1980s, identifying the reasons why a similar programme of democratization fared little better in this later period.

Enterprise elections

The importance of making cadres accountable to the people through some form of election was stressed in the writings and

209 Henley and Nyaw, 'The development of work incentives in Chinese industrial enterprises - material versus non-material incentives,' in Warner (ed.) *Management Reforms in China*, 144.

210 Ibid., 144.

public statements of a number of Guangzhou Democracy Wall activists. For example, at an official forum sponsored by the provincial Communist Youth League, Li Min²¹¹ noted that cadres' attitudes towards the rank and file had changed for the better when they were facing re-election, but that now that elections were no longer on the agenda, attitudes had changed back. This insistence on the need for democratic elections was part and parcel of the campaign to replace arbitrary personal rule by individuals with democracy and a transparent and impartial legal system; it was integral to the concerns of Democracy Wall.

Democratic elections were another point on which there was some agreement between the movement's activists and Party reformers. Enterprise elections for cadres below the level of the factory director, as was mentioned earlier, had been promoted since the beginning of the reforms in 1978, with mixed results. But in the second half of 1980 the importance of democratic elections as a check on cadre bureaucratism and misuse of power began to be stressed very heavily²¹². It was also acknowledged in the national press that 'the very urgent demand of the working masses for the power to elect and recall leading cadres including factory directors and managers has basically not been realized.'²¹³ As is often the case when discussing the post-Mao reforms, there is a mixture of motives governing policy choices here which needs to be borne in mind. There is also the usual caveat that what was in the press, or in official guidelines and circulars, was not necessarily what was happening on the ground, and that in any case there was scope for considerable variation in actual practice during the period when regulations were still being tested out and had

211 Of the Guangzhou-based literary journal *Langhua* (Waves).

212 See for Example *Nanfang Ribao* 9.10.80, 1; 8.11.80, 2.

213 *Renmin Ribao* 5.10.80, quoted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 56 (1981), 50.

not yet been made permanent.

Having said that, the influence of political movements inside and outside China is discernible in the changing attitudes of workers and the authorities towards cadre elections. Cadre elections were not made a plank of the enterprise reform programme solely because the Party was ideologically committed to the democratization of management. As was mentioned above, there were also reasons of economic efficiency to be considered. The linking of workers' bonuses to enterprise performance was supposed to ensure that workers would be strongly motivated to elect competent managers; in this way, cadre elections could serve as a way of bringing in younger, better-educated and more competent managers to replace the 'dead wood' of ex-army or ex-rural cadres of an older generation who owed their positions more to their political standing than to any expertise in industrial management.²¹⁴ Reform of the system of lifetime cadre employment (the 'iron armchair') thus could be underpinned by democratic elections.

But in addition to these efficiency considerations, the combined impact of Democracy Wall, Solidarity, and industrial unrest in China helped to create pressure for democratic elections. As had happened on other issues, what had been written in unofficial journals up to a year before in the second half of 1980 found its way into the state-controlled press in only slightly milder language. Wang Xizhe, defending his right to talk about the problem of China's bureaucratic (and, in his view, un-Marxist) system of government, had noted that no matter how bad the relations between cadres and the masses, cadres were still sure of a job for life and could

214 Lockett considers efficiency considerations to have been decisive in prompting the Party to opt for systematic elections of cadres below factory director level, rather than pressures from below or motivational concerns (Lockett, 'Enterprise management: Moves towards democracy?', 234-5).

only ever go up the career ladder, not down.²¹⁵ In November 1980, *Nanfang Ribao* concurred that bureaucratism was generated by the cadre system in which officials were only responsible to those above them, and not to their 'masters' below, and that democratic elections would allow the masses finally to make some progress in ending bureaucratism and autocracy. Unlike Wang, the paper didn't invoke the Paris Commune as its ideal, but it did state that China's democratic systems at all levels were fundamentally unsound, with a resolution of the National People's Congress having less influence than a few words from a top cadre, making China in some respects even less democratic than capitalist nations.²¹⁶ The authors of the *Li Yizhe* tract had of course been imprisoned for saying as much in 1974, an irony which was not lost on Wang.

When considering the pressure from workers for the right to elect cadres and to have genuine representation in the workplace, the influence of *Solidarity* should not be overlooked either. *Solidarity's* demands, the first of which was the right to elect independent trade unions, had been published in full in a number of unofficial journals²¹⁷, and were also reported in the official press in August 1980. As was noted earlier, striking Chinese workers in the winter of 1980-1 made demands ranging from special representation on the workers' congress to the right to form independent unions, clearly influenced by *Solidarity*. The demand for cadre elections is also related to the question of representation and gaining a proper voice for workers in enterprise management; therefore, it seems likely that reports of Polish

215 First published in *Renmin zhi Sheng* 8, this interview was reprinted in *Shiyue Pinglun* 39 (1979), 16-17.

216 *Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.80, 2.

217 According to *Shiyue Pinglun* 71 (1982), 45-49, unofficial journals in Guangzhou and Taiyuan and *Zeren* reprinted *Solidarity's* '21 Demands' and 'Charter of Rights of the Polish workers'.

workers' demands also intensified pressure from below for Chinese workers to be allowed a much greater degree of influence over their managers. Liao Gailong's report which stressed the importance of democratic elections for union representatives in China if a 'Polish crisis' was to be avoided also emphasized the need to allow workers to recommend the removal of incompetent managers, and in time to elect enterprise personnel.²¹⁸

Scope and conduct of cadre elections

Despite the election of cadres, including factory directors, being acknowledged as an 'urgent demand' of workers, and despite the Party's apparent acceptance of the case for democratic accountability of management through workplace elections, little progress was ultimately made in setting up a system of regular enterprise elections. It will be remembered that proposals put forward by Lai Ruoyu back in the mid-1950s had included provisions for the election of cadres up to and including factory directors, but that this had been one of the first management democratization measures to be ruled out of bounds, the argument being that factory directors had to be appointed by the state rather than being elected by the workers' congress since they represented the interests of the whole people, and not just those of the workforce of the particular enterprise. Similarly, although the election of factory directors had received a certain amount of official support during the years of experimentation, there was no mention of this when the Temporary Regulations on the Congress of Workers and Staff Members in State Enterprises were promulgated in July 1981. The regulations only provided for the election by the workers' congress of 'leading administrative personnel', while the

218 Liao Gailong, 'The "1980 Reform" Programme of China', *Qishi Niandai* 134 (1.3.81), translated in FBIS 16.3.81, U13.

congress was also charged with 'upholding the authority of the factory director', who had only to accept that body's 'inspection and supervision'.²¹⁹

So even before the regulations governing the new system of democratic management were finalized, this measure, which would have taken workers' power in the enterprise an important step further than it had ever been before, had apparently been dropped. The election of factory directors was still discussed as a desirable future development²²⁰, and elections were actually held in some enterprises, reportedly with good results²²¹. But it does not seem to have become common practise. Trials of factory director elections in Shenzhen were reported in 1984²²², but it was also proposed in that year that factory directors, appointed by the state, should have the right to make their own cadre appointments within the enterprise and could transfer cadres who had been elected to their posts²²³, so it seems that although experimentation was continuing, not all of it was in the direction of more widespread election of top management.

On the whole it seems that to date, workers' congresses and similar bodies only have the power to make proposals and

219 *Renmin Ribao* 20.7.81, 1.

220 See for example *Nanfang Ribao* 26.10.81, 1.

221 *Nanfang Ribao* 15.4.82, 2.

222 *Guangzhou Ribao* 11.4.84, 1; and 27.6.84, 1. The results of such elections had to be ratified by the higher level, but it was said that the results should be allowed to stand except where one of the 'three types of people' had been elected. The campaign against the 'three types' (people who had illegitimately risen to power, had engaged in factional struggle, or had been involved in 'beating, smashing and looting' during the Cultural Revolution) began in 1983 as part of a movement to negate completely the Cultural Revolution; see Chan, 'Dispelling misconceptions', 82.

223 *Guangzhou Ribao* 8.6.84, 1; 27.6.84, 1; 29.12.84, 1.

recommendations to the higher levels regarding the appointment or dismissal of top managers. There was a case in Dalian in 1991 where the workers' congress voted to recommend the removal of a factory director who was accused of a variety of offences, including personal corruption, nepotism in housing and job allocation, unreasonable lowering of piece-rates so as to intensify work for production workers and reduce their incomes, practising *de facto* one-man management, ignoring the workers' congress and workers' democratic rights, and cursing and arbitrarily punishing workers (a list of misdemeanours with which workers involved in the strikes of 1956 and 1957 would have been all too familiar). Some workers were apparently not satisfied with the near two-thirds majority for recommending recall, and went out on strike to press their demand for the director's removal. The strike was short-lived, and the dispute was resolved with the help of the district trade union which urged workers to use the proper legal channels in future rather than strikes; the proper channels were the local government and Party Committee, who were to study the case and take appropriate action.²²⁴ This now seems to be the limit of workers' power to affect appointments at the level of factory director.

At other levels of management, however, cadres were to face election either by the whole workforce or by the workers' congress. We noted earlier that elections for heads of groups, sections, and workshops initially aroused little enthusiasm among workers who were aware that the real power in the enterprise lay with the Party Committee and the director. There was widespread scepticism, too, as to how free and democratic elections would be, and given the experiences with elections for enterprise cadres and union representatives in the 1950s discussed in section two, this scepticism was not without justification. There appears sometimes to have been a degree of self-censorship in the nomination process, whereby

224 *Gonghui Xinxi* 8 (15.4.91), 22-3.

workers would refrain from nominating anyone who, for reasons of family background or previous political problems, might not be approved by the higher levels (all appointments were subject to such approval), and if nominated, such people might seek to withdraw from the ballot.²²⁵ Not all enterprises were deemed to have the appropriate conditions for holding elections, and in some cases 'the government advocated the use of opinion polls at regular intervals to provide workers with a means of examining and evaluating the work of the leading cadres in the enterprise', where elections were 'not feasible'.²²⁶ In recent years the contracting-out of enterprise management has further complicated matters, and annual democratic evaluation of leading cadres in these enterprises has been recommended, while elections can still take place in collective enterprises.²²⁷

Election procedure was not standardized in the early years of the reforms, and still seems to vary somewhat between cities and between different types of enterprise. In the early 1980s, some enterprises voted by a show of hands while others held secret ballots, and some held 'primaries' as part of the nomination process. In most cases the list of candidates arrived at by a process of open nomination, group discussion and gradual elimination contained the same number of people as there were posts to be filled; only in exceptional circumstance, such as when two or more candidates had almost equal support, would the final slate have more candidates than posts.²²⁸

There was no reason why cadres should not be re-elected to their posts in these elections, and indeed they very often

225 *China Reconstructs* 28, 5 (May 1979), 7-8.

226 Tung, *Chinese industrial society after Mao*, 165.

227 *Gonghui Xinx* 7 (1.4.91), 9.

228 *China Reconstructs* 28, 5 (May 1979), 7-8.

were, especially in the case of technical staff who were generally better qualified for their position than anyone else in the enterprise who might challenge them. But it is easy to see why cadres 'accustomed to issuing administrative orders' might 'worry about their prestige if they are subject to the supervision of the masses'²²⁹, and might see elections as a threat and do their best to obstruct them. Overt attempts to manipulate elections, for example by numbering ballot papers so that workers voting against a cadre could be identified, or by threatening reprisals against opponents, were 'by no means unknown'²³⁰, but the influence of leading management and Party cadres often did not even need to be exercised in such an obvious way. It is possible that workers' doubts about the fairness of elections may have made them less than enthusiastic about active participation, leaving cadres to dominate the process, so that workers' views were not in fact reflected in the results. Cadres could also find legitimate reasons for opposition to elections: 'Objections to control from below' could be couched in terms of 'the supposed need for secrecy in management work and the possibility that the workforce will not make the "right" choice', and 'the legacy of the Cultural Revolution in the area of work discipline'²³¹ could also be used as an excuse for opposing elections in case 'production order' was disturbed as a result. Again, these arguments are familiar to us from the 1950s.

Cadre resistance

The main obstacle to increasing the powers of the workers' congress and to the institution of regular cadre elections in enterprises seems to have been resistance from

229 *Beijing Review* 23, 35 (1.9.80), 23.

230 Lockett, 'Enterprise management - Moves towards democracy?', 237.

231 *Ibid.*, 238.

cadres. We have just seen that interference in election procedures was not unusual, and also that cadres elected by the workforce could be transferred without notice or consultation by the factory director or the higher levels. Accounts of cadre resistance hampering management democratization and the work of the workers' congress accompanied the reforms throughout, but were especially frequent during 1981. This raises the possibility that the quite radical proposals of the previous few months, during which time it had been stated categorically that enterprise autonomy meant giving more powers to workers, not to cadres, had generated a backlash among management and Party officials.²³²

It is also noticeable that the most outspoken support for a powerful workers' congress and for cadre elections came from the labour movement press, namely *Gongren Ribao*. It was *Gongren Ribao* which, in a seminal article on the workers' congress system in October 1980, had adopted the language of Democracy Wall in describing how in the past, the role of the workers' congress had been limited to consultation and discussion, and how workers had had no systemic or legal guarantees of their right to participate. The paper insisted that in future, the exact powers of the workers' congress must be clearly defined and protected in law, so that the congress's decisions no longer depended on 'the quality of a few top cadres', and that laws and regulations must be established governing the election and recall of congress representatives and presidium members to avoid the congress's powers ending up in the hands of a minority.²³³ In late 1981 the paper was still insisting on the 'innumerable advantages'

232 Reports of cadre resistance can be found in *Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.79, 3; *Renmin Ribao* 6.3.80, 1; *Nanfang Ribao* 22.10.80, 3; 29.11.80, 2; *Gongren Ribao* 18.2.81, 1; 7.11.81, 1; *Nanfang Ribao* 26.10.81, 1; *Renmin Ribao* 10.6.81, 1; 27.10.83, 2-4.

233 *Gongren Ribao* 21.10.80, 1.

of the workers' congress, which it saw as the way to establish 'democracy and a legal system' within enterprises²³⁴, but it is possible that support for management democratization was less strong in other quarters.

Reports on progress in setting up and running workers' congresses during 1981 revealed that although a majority of enterprises had set up a workers' congress (90% of large and medium enterprises in major cities had them by June 1981), only about 25% of workers' congresses were running well. 60% were said to be operating more or less satisfactorily, while 15% were performing poorly and had already degenerated into formalism.²³⁵ Vice-Premier Wan Li urged all cadres, as communists, not to be afraid of the masses and to be willing to hand over powers to the workers' congress, and it was restated that the workers' congress did not represent a negation of centralism and was not tantamount to anarchism. Cadres were assured that the powers of the workers' congress were limited to consultation on matters not affecting workers' direct personal interests, and that cadre elections would only be introduced gradually.²³⁶ But despite these assurances, cadre support for democratization and the workers' congress system does not seem to have been forthcoming. *Nanfang Ribao* identified the main misgivings in enterprises about the workers' congress as the 'four afraids': the Party Secretary was afraid that the workers' congress would go on for far too long; the factory director was afraid that it would 'refuse to leave the stage' and would try to take over his role; the union chair was afraid that it would deadlock relations

234 *Gongren Ribao* 7.11.81, 1.

235 These figures were cited at a conference on democratic management reported in *Renmin Ribao* (10.6.81, 1) and *Nanfang Ribao* (10.6.81, 3).

236 *Renmin Ribao* 10.6.81, 1. This limitation on its role was confirmed when the Temporary Regulations governing the workers' congress were published the following month.

between management and workers; and the workers and staff themselves were afraid of being made to 'wear small shoes', i.e. they were afraid of management reprisals if they exercised their democratic rights through the workers' congress.

The situation in Guangdong was acknowledged to be even worse than elsewhere. It was reported towards the end of 1981 that many large and medium-sized enterprises had still not set up a workers' congress, and that even in those enterprises experimenting with increased autonomy, where the reforms had gone furthest, few workers' congresses were running well after their establishment.²³⁷ An evaluation of the reforms in Guangdong published a decade later painted a similar picture, observing that democratic management and the role of the workers' congress had been neglected in the province, weakening workers' sense of being masters and leading to a pervasive 'wage-labourer' mentality among workers who felt that they were 'working for the factory director'.²³⁸

The reasons for Guangdong's poor performance in this respect seem to lie in the province's otherwise rapid reforms, which resulted in greatly increased powers, under enterprise autonomy, for the factory director. In theory the 'factory director responsibility system' should be integrated with democratic management and participation in management by workers and staff, but in practice, the result is often similar to the one-man management of the past. Many references to this problem can be found in the trade union and general press of the late 1980s and early 1990s in China. The 'hired hand' and 'work according to pay' mentality among workers is frequently noted as a problem in these years, and the difficulty of preserving workers' democratic rights under

237 *Nanfang Ribao* 26.10.81, 1.

238 See Wang Zhuo et al. (eds.), *Guangdong gaige kaifang pingshuo* (An evaluation of reform and the open door in Guangdong), 265-266.

the factory director responsibility system is also discussed, as is the re-appearance of 'one-man management' by factory directors who regularly by-pass or fail to convene the workers' congress²³⁹.

The potential contradiction between increased autonomy for factory directors and management democratization was recognized at an early stage; in fact, the factory director responsibility system was seen by some as making the role of the workers' congress more important than ever if the danger of a return to one-man management was to be averted. Zhao Ziyang reminded state enterprises of the importance of guaranteeing workers' right to participate in management once all powers to direct production and to manage the enterprise had been entrusted by the state to the factory director.²⁴⁰ But despite this awareness of the potential problem, it does not seem to have been possible to protect workers' existing, quite limited rights to participate in management alongside the other planks of the management reforms. This again casts doubt on the claim that management democratization and the promotion of the workers' congress was anything other than instrumental in the reform programme. By the early 1990s, workers generally seem to have felt that the economic reforms had weakened their role as masters and democratic management, even those these were now enshrined in law in the Enterprise Law. A reflection of the way in which power shifted within the enterprise during the 1980s but still remained out of the

239 See for example *Gonghui Xinx* 3 (1.2.91), 18-19.

240 *Guangzhou Ribao* 16.5.84, 1. See also *Guangzhou Ribao* 26.8.84, 1; 19.10.84, 1. A 1986 Xinhua News Agency report also referred to the question of factory directors' powers and democratic management, citing a Shanghai enterprise where workers evaluated the director once a year (and other cadres twice a year). The factory director would be called upon to resign by the workers' congress if a majority of workers evaluated him unfavourably, but the congress had no power of direct dismissal (*Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 6.9.86, translated in *FBIS-CHI* 8.9.86, 02-03).

hands of rank-and-file workers was the comment that 'in the past, trade union cadres took orders from the party secretaries and now they take orders from the factory managers.'²⁴¹

The trade unions

It was stated at the beginning of this section that one respect in which the late 1970s and early 1980s resembled the Hundred Flowers era of the 1950s was that the official unions were in crisis, with workers' confidence in them virtually non-existent and serious doubts being expressed as to whether they could play any useful role. It is a measure of the extent of the unions' crisis that they have not loomed as large in this discussion of the early reform period as they did in the mid-1950s. Many discussions of democratic management, even in *Gongren Ribao*, make no mention whatsoever of a role for the trade unions. There were proposals that the unions should again serve as the standing body of the workers' congress, but as was mentioned earlier, in many enterprises bodies to oversee the implementation of congress resolutions were set up quite separately from the official unions.

As with the revamped workers' congress, some of the unions' earlier problems were more openly acknowledged in the post-Mao period than they had been before, and the unions did gain a greater degree of independence of action from the Party for a time, at least in theory. As part of the general process of reassessing the PRC's history and politics right back to 1949, it was admitted that 'left' errors had been made with regard to trade unions as early as the 1950s. Li Lisan and Lai Ruoyu were both posthumously rehabilitated in 1980 and 1979 respectively, and it was stated the accusations against

241 Chiang Chen-chang, 'The role of the trade unions in mainland China', *Issues and Studies* 26, 2 (February 1990), 86.

them of syndicalism and economism had been 'erroneous and groundless'²⁴². However, in the early stages of the post-Mao period, the unions' role was not defined in a way which was strikingly different from that of the 1950s. Mobilizing workers for production and for the realization of the four modernizations was still regularly cited as the unions' core task²⁴³, with tasks such as labour protection, education, improving skill levels, and safeguarding workers' democratic rights coming further down the list. When in the spring of 1979 in Guangzhou, around the time of the anniversary of the April Fifth Movement, there was a certain amount of unrest connected with Democracy Wall, the unions were called upon by the city authorities to guide workers in the 'correct' exercise of their democratic rights, oppose extreme democratization and individualism, and lead the workers to combat the 'small minority' of criminals who were 'destroying social order and production order'. So it would seem that the unions were still being cast in the role of controllers, mobilizers and educators of workers, rather than representatives of their special interests.

However, particularly after the advent of Solidarity, more emphasis was given to unions' duty to protect the legitimate interests and democratic rights of workers first and foremost, while still also bearing in mind the interests of the enterprise and of the state. Unions were said to have swapped 'fear' for 'daring' in representing workers' views to the enterprise Party Committee²⁴⁴. From the end of 1979, a

242 See Ni Zhifu's report to the 3rd Enlarged Session of the 9th ACFTU Executive Committee, *Gongren Ribao* 13.10.81, 1. Former *Gongren Ribao* editor Chen Yongwen was also rehabilitated in 1979 (*Nanfang Ribao* 8.11.79, 3).

243 *Nanfang Ribao* 3.3.79, 1; 8.11.79, 3; 16.4.81, 3; *Renmin Ribao* 19.10.83, 1.

244 Although in this case in Henan, it took some effort on the part of union cadres to find out what workers' grievances were, since workers were

concerted effort began to recover the confidence of workers in grass-roots union organizations, and some within the unions admitted that their difficulty in asserting operational independence from the Party in the past had in part been their own fault: 'Unions not representing the interests of the workers are bound to be weak.'²⁴⁵ As was mentioned earlier, the unions' very existence had been questioned in the late 1970s by some who saw no meaningful role for them, and union officials and activists seem to have been aware that if the unions lacked the confidence of their members, there was indeed 'no meaning to their existence'. An article in *Gongren Ribao* summed up what had happened to the official unions since the Hundred Flowers thus: 'Since 1957, many union organizations have gradually lost their original prestige and role, falling back on a role of education, the organization of labour emulation campaigns, and some redundant work of the Party and the government.' According to another piece in the same issue, the trade unions had shown 'very little interest in the immediate interests of the workers', and consequently workers 'have never taken seriously the things the unions did.'²⁴⁶

In response to workers' criticisms of unrepresentative 'signboard' unions, basic-level union cadres were criticized for tending to pit their duty to the Party against their duty to workers, and were reminded that the unions were to be the workers' own, trusted organization, and one which had every right to speak out on its members' behalf when orders from above conflicted with workers' wishes or interests²⁴⁷. But

unwilling to talk frankly their union representatives in the presence of the workshop leadership (*Gongren Ribao* 23.3.79, 1).

245 *Gongren Ribao* 18.11.80, 2.

246 *Gongren Ribao* 18.11.80, translated in *CREA* 120 (16.3.81), 53.

247 *Gongren Ribao* 9.10.79, translated in *SWB/FE/6244/BII/14*.

although at least some in the union hierarchy seem to have been sincere in this effort, overall only changes in emphasis were being made with regard to the unions' role; they were not being given free rein to stand on the side of the workers and represent their interests first and foremost. The reforms are perhaps best characterized as 'attempts to make the unions appear more independent of the Party.'²⁴⁸

The influence of Solidarity and Democracy Wall can be seen as we trace the development of the unions' 'new line' from 1978 through to the early 1980s. The labour movement press exhibited much greater concern about the extent to which workers had become alienated from their unions in the autumn of 1980 than it had done previously, and the language in which this concern was expressed carried clear echoes of Democracy Wall. In November of 1980 Gongren Ribao ran a number of articles on this subject, one of which insisted that the unions' 'fundamental objective....is to protect the legal rights and interests of all workers, for which the union cadres should be responsible first.'²⁴⁹ The two points to note here are firstly, that cadres' duty to workers is explicitly put before their duty to other authorities in the enterprise and beyond; and secondly, the reference to legal rights. In terms strongly reminiscent of Li Yizhe's and Democracy Wall's demand for a socialist legal system institutionalizing protection for citizens' rights, the unions now called for 'the necessary protection of law and support from the government', and demanded that the relationships between the unions and the workers' congress, administrative and Party organizations 'should be clearly defined in the law or by the institutions.'²⁵⁰

248 Saich, 'Workers in the workers' state: urban workers in the PRC,' in Goodman (ed.) *Groups and politics in the People's Republic of China*, 164 (emphasis added).

249 Gongren Ribao 18.11.80, 2, in CREA 120 (16.3.81) 55.

250 Ibid., 55.

Liao Gailong's report, also dating from the autumn of 1980, was very clear about the likelihood of a 'Polish crisis' in China if the official unions were not revitalized, made more democratic, and freed from arbitrary Party interference, citing Lenin on the necessity of trade union representation even under socialism.²⁵¹ The problem of the unions' own internal lack of democracy was brought up by others as well, and the importance of workers being able to elect their own union representatives was stressed. Mention was also made of cases where democratically-elected union representatives were arbitrarily moved from their posts by Party officials without consultation.²⁵² All this discussion was of course taking place against the background of Democracy Wall's praise for Solidarity coupled with industrial unrest and sporadic self-organization among Chinese workers; by the middle of 1981, once this stimulus to reform had receded in importance, the more outspoken statements in support of a greater degree of union independence were no longer heard. At the 10th ACFTU congress in October 1983, Ni Zhifu's address included among the unions' core tasks speaking and acting for the workers and protecting their lawful interests, and called for closer relations between unions and masses, but paid more attention to the unions' role in improving economic results, and in educating workers in patriotism, collectivism, socialism, and communist ideals, morality and culture, a very conventional pre-1978 view of what the unions should regard as their main tasks.

One way of assessing the extent to which unions gained a greater ability to represent workers as a result of the post-Mao reforms is to look at comments on union prestige and effectiveness later in the 1980s. These reports give the

251 Liao Gailong, 'The "1980 Reform" Programme of China', *Qishi Niandai* 134 (1.3.81), translated in FBIS 16.3.81, U10.

252 *Xinhua News Agency* 4.12.80, translated in SWB/FE/6595/BII/1.

impression that little had changed with regard to the unions' main problems. In mid-1984 the Guangzhou Municipal Federation of Trade Unions, responding to an ACFTU call to basic-level union organizations to make themselves the 'family and friend' of the workers, reported that a large proportion of enterprise union branches in the city were failing to live up to this ideal, and needed to rectify their organization and forge close ties with workers as quickly as possible, speaking out on workers' behalf, acting to solve their problems, and thus gaining their trust.²⁵³

In 1987 a case in Qingdao, reported in the national press, painted a familiar picture of an enterprise trade union organization which was not even capable of protecting its own. A worker in a pressure-gauge factory was forced off the workers' congress, despite being democratically elected, after making criticisms of the enterprise leadership for falsifying production figures and applying rules on compensation for medical expenses too rigidly and simplistically. A dispute over the medical bills of a worker who had subsequently died seems to have raised the emotional temperature of the confrontation. The removal of this worker representative from his production post was ordered by the head of the enterprise trade union in violation of proper procedures, and he was left 'awaiting re-assignment' on living expenses of one yuan per day. The ACFTU commented that when a union failed to uphold workers' democratic rights and the democratic management role of the workers' congress, it not only lost workers' confidence, but came to be opposed to the workers, and that such a union was worthless.²⁵⁴ It was also reported later in the year that there had been a growing tendency over the past two years for Party and enterprise officials to carry out attacks and reprisals against union officials and workers' congress representatives who had the courage to stand up to

253 *Guangzhou Ribao* 28.5.84, 1.

254 See the three reports in *Gongren Ribao* 15.6.87, 1.

them and to defend workers' legitimate rights. Continued worker alienation from the official unions was observed, and the unions were criticized for holding themselves responsible to the higher levels but not to the members they were supposed to serve.²⁵⁵

Perhaps even more damning was the verdict of a survey undertaken by the ACFTU itself in spring 1988, already referred to above. Less than 10% of respondents in the survey considered that trade unions could 'speak for workers and solve their problems', while 25% said unions had 'only collected dues and conducted recreational activities'. When asked whether their enterprise trade union could be called the 'family' or 'friend' of the workers, less than 20% replied in the affirmative while nearly 55% answered 'no' or 'not really'. 30% thought workers' congresses were effective or very effective, but 70% said they were only occasionally effective or did their duties in form only. The only difference noted by workers was, as mentioned above, that union cadres were now ordered about by factory directors rather than Party secretaries. Workers said that in general they did not turn to the trade union for help with their problems.²⁵⁶

This demonstrates that the early 1980s efforts to breathe new life into the old participatory and representative structures set up for the workers by higher authorities, including the enterprise trade union and the workers' congress, whatever the motives for introducing them, had made no very noticeable or lasting difference to enterprise democracy, and had not tackled the key problem of worker alienation from existing structures of representation and

255 Gongren Ribao 9.8.87, 1; 11.8.87, 1 and 2.

256 Chiang Chen-chang, 'The role of trade unions in mainland China,' *Issues and Studies* 26, 2 (Feb.1990), 85-86. Survey taken from Liaowang Zhoukan 17, 17, (25.4.88).

authority. These efforts also manifestly failed to divert workers from responding to the worsening economic situation in the cities with strikes and stoppages in 1987 and 1988, and from taking part in the Democracy Movement of 1989. In this latter movement workers formed independent unions on a wider scale and with more publicity than ever before, the stated aims of these autonomous organizations being to address political and economic demands, 'based on the wishes of the majority of the workers' and 'to monitor the legal representatives of all state and collective enterprises, guaranteeing that the workers become the real masters of the enterprise.'²⁵⁷ The ACFTU's tentative support for the democracy movement resulted in a stern re-statement of the unions' proper role by the Party the following year. This description of the unions' duty to take into account state, enterprise and long-term interests and to persuade workers to do the same, could have been lifted straight out of the press of the period of the anti-rightist campaign. It certainly offered no solution to the perennial problem of the unions' having to serve two masters, one far more powerful than the other, and having responsibility in the enterprise without authority.

Conclusions

So in the late 1970s and early 1980s, no way was found to go beyond the 1950s formulations of workers' democratic rights within the enterprise or in wider society. This was in spite of some very radical proposals made under the pressure of Solidarity's rise in Poland and the possibility of similar events in China if Democracy Wall was ever to form organizational links with the many restive workers involved in protests and strikes at this time. However, despite the successful repression of unrest in China by the middle of

257 'Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation Provisional Memorandum', *Democracy Wall* 11, n.d.

1981, none of the fundamental problems behind it were actually resolved. The official unions proved unable to gain workers' respect or allegiance during the 1980s, and a precedent had been set for workers in China to form their own independent unions to represent their interests, again under the influence of Solidarity. In some cases the political nature of these workers' organizations was explicitly discussed, so it is not all that surprising to find Beijing's *Gongzilian* formulating a political role for themselves in May 1989:

In the entire people's patriotic democratic movement, led by the students in mid-April, the majority of the Chinese workers have demonstrated a strong wish to take part in politics. At the same time, they also realize that there is not yet an organization which can truly represent the wishes expressed by the working masses. Therefore, we recognize that there is a need to set up an autonomous organization which will speak for the workers and which will organize the realization of workers' participation and consultation in political affairs.²⁵⁸

Workers' unrest in this period definitely constituted a more serious problem for the Party than it had done in the 1950s, both organizationally and in terms of ideas. The issues behind the widespread discontent are very familiar to us from earlier confrontations: cadre privilege and corruption; the inadequate standards of living, in comparison, of those who actually do the work; the failure of the official unions to stand up for workers' rights and interests; the lack of effective institutions guaranteeing workers' right to participate in enterprise management; the arbitrary exercise of power by Party and management officials who are not

258 Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation Provisional Memorandum, translated in *Democracy Wall* 11 (n.d.).

democratically accountable to their 'masters'; and the tendency for the Party elite to form themselves into a new ruling class, one whose status was tending to become hereditary, and one which had gained control, if not ownership as this was traditionally understood, of the means of production, and thus lived off the labour of others in an exploitative way.

But this time around the protests gained an extra edge, for two main reasons. One was that both Democracy Wall activists and many of the young workers involved in industrial unrest had in common their experiences in the Cultural Revolution. They had stood up to, criticized, and sometimes overthrown, cadres in their units before, and they both took a far more critical attitude towards the Party in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and expressed their views more forcefully than before. As important was the fact that so many young Chinese had gained experience during the Cultural Revolution of forming autonomous political organizations and actually exercising the rights of free speech etc. which had long existed only on paper in the Chinese constitution. The other important factor, as it had been back in the 1950s, was the feeling that events in China were part of a broader trend in the socialist world. The rise of Solidarity as a powerful, non-state organization of the working class both inspired and legitimated the efforts of those in China who had come to similar conclusions about the defects of their systems of management and government. It seems also to have played a role in Chinese workers' decisions in some cases to form independent unions during strikes, although this was not unprecedented before 1980.²⁵⁹

259 Chen-chang Chiang notes that 'As early as 1975, workers went on strike in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, and the province became a center of the workers' movement in mainland China. Since then, workers there have formed many secret trade unions.' He cites the Taiwanese *Chinese Communist Affairs Monthly* as his source (Chen-chang Chiang, 'The role of trade unions in mainland China', 93).

At the risk of falling into the trap of imposing a 'Tiananmen teleology' on every trend and event of the previous fifteen years, the question must be raised as to why workers' discontent and unrest in the late 1970s and early 1980s did not develop into the sort of organized activities seen in the spring of 1989, notably the forming of Workers' Autonomous Federations (WAFs) in many Chinese cities. There is something in the arguments that for many of those who had taken to the streets to oppose the Gang of Four, there was a willingness to allow the Deng regime a chance to fulfil its promises of improved livelihood and democratization, and a corresponding reluctance to involve themselves in any mass political activity against the new government. Such activity also still carried clear risks for participants; and a general disenchantment with politics also played a part. Thus a movement which had cadre corruption and privilege as one of its main concerns was not able to attract a mass following as it did in 1989 (and as a state-sponsored campaign along the same lines had back in 1974). The Party's efforts to portray Democracy Wall activists as dangerous dissidents, anarchists, counter-revolutionaries and criminals also seem to have been fairly successful. Even if the population at large didn't believe all of these charges, the regime had still sent a signal of how it saw the activists, making clear to everyone the likely consequences of getting involved with such enemies of the state. The years 1978 to 1981 can be seen as offering a precedent for 1989 in some respects, however, since despite the failure of Democracy Wall to turn itself into a broad-based mass movement, some independent unions were formed, and towards the end of the movement, the mass of discontented workers and the minority of outspoken activists did begin to see the value of linking up.

To a certain extent what may have saved the authorities in the early 1980s from the emergence all over China of independent workers' organizations, linked with the dissident activists involved in the unofficial publications movement,

was the economic reforms. As was mentioned earlier, workers were by no means automatic beneficiaries of the reform programme in every respect. Several measures, notably contract employment, ending the 'iron rice-bowl', and managers' rights to hire and fire under enterprise autonomy, had the effect of undermining job security. Inflation, a product of the early years of reform, also hit many workers' standards of living, and sharply differentiated individual bonuses were resisted by a workforce which still exhibited a strong attachment to egalitarianism in distribution. But the reforms did still offer many workers a chance to increase their income through the distribution of retained profits as bonuses, and many did begin to experience a higher standard of living through the first half of the 1980s. The picture later on in the decade is somewhat different, however, and the change is a significant one with regard to workers' attitudes towards management and the ruling Party. This will be discussed further in the conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

The first four confrontations and 1989

The aim of this study has been to examine the first four major confrontations between industrial workers and the Party in order to ascertain whether any of these conflicts can be considered as a precedent for workers' activities during the 1989 Democracy Movement, activities which have often been described as unprecedented. In doing this, it has also been our intention to try to uncover some of the 'hidden history of workers' resistance'¹ which has hitherto been obscured by the perception of movements such as the Hundred Flowers and the Cultural Revolution as primarily the concern of intellectuals. It is hoped that the preceding sections have helped to dispel the misconception that workers' involvement in this type of movement has always been opportunistic and motivated by narrow economic concerns. The political overtones of many disputes originally sparked off by economic grievances has thus been a recurring theme.

The focus on a somewhat neglected group can also result in new insights into the periods of unrest and confrontation examined. A good example of this emerges in the last section. Looking at the early 1980s, it would be difficult to understand why the authorities thought it necessary to launch a final campaign to discredit and suppress Democracy Wall in 1981, when most observers agreed that readership of unofficial journals was falling and the movement seemed to be running out of steam in any case, unless one was aware of the industrial unrest going on at that time which gave rise to the fear that the remaining activists, many of them workers, might link up

1 Perry, 'Shanghai's strike wave of 1957', 4.

with discontented sections of the workforce and start a mass movement. The real threat the movement still posed is only apparent when the importance of workers' activities is properly acknowledged. Another example of the benefits of this perspective is that by looking primarily at workers' grievances and demands and at the issues which concerned them, it is possible to detect a considerable degree of continuity between all five of the post-1949 confrontations. The extent to which the 1989 Democracy Movement was concerned with the same issues as not only the earlier Democracy Wall Movement, but also the Cultural Revolution, has been recognized by some, notably Jack Gray and Jonathan Unger², but the concentration on workers' activities helps to bring it into sharper focus.

Looking at the issues which most concerned workers in the 1989 protests, the links with earlier outbreaks of protest are easily discernible. The widespread resentment at cadre lifestyles and corruption so evident in the movement's documents was the 1980s version of a perennial theme in workers' discontent; this time around, it was of course intensified by the new threats to workers' security of inflation and the undermining of job security under the economic reforms. Andrew Walder makes a point familiar to us from the confrontation of the mid-1950s when he observes that in 1989, 'Inflation and corruption appear to have fuelled public protest primarily by enhancing the workers' sense of

2 See Unger's comment that *Shengwulian's* denunciation of the 'red capitalist class' was 'a similar view of the polity [to that which] devoid of radical rhetoric, brought a million people into Tiananmen in 1989' (Unger, 'Whither China?', 3). Jack Gray also noted recently that 'The issues against which the Red Guards rebelled in 1966 were the same as those which brought China's students to Tiananmen in 1989; the language differed, but the content was the same - corrupt privilege and the abuse of power' (Gray, reviewing Rafe de Crespigny's *China This Century* in the *China Quarterly* 140 (December 1994), 1157).

powerlessness and resentment at official privilege'.³ Once again, it was not absolute deprivation which generated anger so much as workers' inability to remedy the blatant unfairness of a society in which, as a leaflet written by a worker in 1989 put it:

the words "owned by the people" actually mean "owned by a small group of the bourgeoisie". That group calls us the "masters of the country", yet we live in overcrowded conditions from generation to generation. On the other hand, those "civil servant" build villas, and have police escorts for their luxury cars - while we 'masters' travel on crowded buses.⁴

It is very noticeable that although some of the ideological heat had gone out of the language of the 1989 protests (no references to 'red capitalists' or anything similar), nevertheless, workers at least were still identifying their leaders as an exploitative minority which lived off others' labour; and the document quoted above actually used the term 'bourgeoisie' with reference to privileged officials. This analysis of the power relations between workers and the Party can be traced back through Democracy Wall, April Fifth, the Li Yizhe poster, and the Cultural Revolution, all the way back to the Hundred Flowers period when it was first suggested that officials might constitute 'a privileged class standing above the people'⁵.

3 Walder, 'The political sociology of the Beijing upheaval of 1989', *Problems of Communism* 38, 5 (September-October 1989), 34).

4 'Letter to the students' (signed 'A Worker'), translated in Mok and Harrison (eds.), *Voices from Tiananmen Square*, 109.

5 Fu Rong, 'My understanding of the contradictions among the people under the socialist system', *Xuexi* 24 (18.12.57), in *ECMM* 123 (17.3.58), 20.

One other similarity between 1989 and earlier confrontations was that in the Democracy Movement, workers asserted their right, even their duty, as the most advanced class in society, to get involved in politics. Recalling the words of the Communist Party Manifesto of 1848, the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation (Gongzilian) gave this statement of its purpose:

The working class is the most advanced class and we, in the Democratic Movement, should be prepared to demonstrate its great power.

The People's Republic of China is supposedly led by the working class, and we have every right to drive out the dictators...

To bring down dictatorship and totalitarianism and promote democracy in China is our undeniable responsibility.

In the Democracy Movement, "we have nothing to lose but our chains, and a world to win."⁶

Another independent Beijing union also drew on a long history of political protest in China when it stated that 'the words on our standard are: science, democracy, freedom, human rights, laws and institutions!'⁷, recalling not only April Fifth, but also May Fourth. Not only did workers appear to take for granted their right to hold the Party to account, showing again that it is unwise to tell any social group year after year that it is the rightful leader of society, and yet expect that group to remain passive when its rights and interests are obviously infringed upon. They were also far more forthright than many of the student protestors, at least in the movement's early stages, in striking directly at the relationship between 'rulers and ruled' in Chinese society as

6 'Declaration of the BWAFF Preparatory Committee on behalf of the workers', translated in Mok Chiu Yu and J Frank Harrison (eds.), *Voices from Tiananmen*

7 'Letter to compatriots of the nation (Beijing Workers' Union), translated in *ibid.*, 108.

the root of the country's problems:

At a time when many students and intellectuals were seeking to strengthen the hand of the moderate and reformist elements within the Party, *gongzilian* articulated a fundamentally different definition of 'the movement'. Even before martial law, *gongzilian* targeted the system.⁸

This contrast also helped to create friction between workers and students, particularly as the workers often felt that the student section of the movement was more interested in emulating the Party leadership, with its elitism, corruption and concern for status, than they were in overthrowing it and establishing an entirely new system.⁹

A final point of similarity between 1989 and earlier confrontations was the way in which workers were aware of events in Eastern Europe. After a resurgence of industrial unrest the previous summer, Solidarity had re-emerged as a major political force in Poland, and, having entered into negotiations with the government in February, had its legal status restored on 17 April 1989.¹⁰ One of the activists involved in setting up Guangzhou's *Gongzilian* reported that

the Solidarnosc union in Poland inspired us a lot. Although Poland had a socialist system, the workers there set up Solidarnosc in the eighties. After

8 Walder and Gong, 'Workers in the Tiananmen protests', 7.

9 See the comments of worker-activists as reported in *ibid.*, 26-27.

10 Paul Lewis, *Central Europe since 1945*, 237-238. Solidarity candidates of course did very well in the subsequent Polish elections in June 1989, events also of great relevance to Chinese pro-democracy activists who had already had some propaganda successes using the election method in 1980 and 1986.

many years of hard work and struggle, they managed to gain legitimacy. We wondered whether we could borrow the experience of Solidarnosc in Poland to form an independent political force outside the Communist Party.¹¹

As had been the case in all four previous confrontations, the specific economic circumstances and the background of workers' everyday lives also played a part in generating support for the protest movement of 1989. The most important aspect of this background was the impact which the economic reforms had had on workers during the second half of the 1980s. One possible explanation for the very rapid emergence of autonomous workers' organizations in the spring of 1989 was the extent of discontent with what many perceived as a worsening of workers' situation under the reforms. It was noted in section four that to a certain extent, restive workers were successfully 'bought off' by rising incomes in the early stages of the reforms, although even then concerns about rising prices and decreased job security were also very evident, and it seemed clear that the Party was only being allowed a limited chance to make good on its promises. If improvements failed to materialize, then the unrest and self-organization that we noted in 1980 and 1981 might very quickly return in China.

What seems to have happened in the second half of the decade, and particularly after 1987, is that rising expectations of improved living standards came into conflict with a perceived worsening of most working-class households'

11 Interview with Guangzhou Gongzilian activist no.4 in *Gongren Qilaile*, 90 (79-80). This activist had followed the vicissitudes of Solidarity's developments since the early 1980s. At least one of the independent unions formed during the 1989 movement, in Nanchang, actually called itself 'Solidarity' (Chen-chang Chiang, 'the role of trade unions in mainland China', 97).

economic circumstances. Whether or not this perception was borne out by the facts is not really the point; it is the perception, almost universal, of promises broken and hopes betrayed which was important in generating support for the Democracy Movement.¹² Two other points should be made before we look in detail at the impact of the reforms on workers. One is that workers' reform-related grievances in most cases still exist today, and in some respects have intensified since 1989, and these grievances are still regularly the cause of industrial disputes. In other words, the background for widespread worker involvement in an anti-government movement is still there.

The second point is that it was not only the issues most often mentioned - inflation, reduced job security and the decline in real incomes - which concerned workers in the late 1980s and after. In the previous section we found being reported in the unofficial journals of Democracy Wall not only workers' dissatisfaction over pay and living conditions, but also complaints about the lack of democracy in enterprise management and about wider issues of industrial organization. This was also the case later in the reform period: the mentality of 'work according to pay', the problem of workers' exclusion from participation in management, criticisms of one-man management and the powerlessness of the workers' congress, in sum, the failure of workers' actual position at work and in society to match their theoretical 'masters' status, were also very important factors in creating the widespread alienation from management and the regime which 1989 made so obvious, and which, according to the analysis of the official trade unions, has not gone away in subsequent years.

12 See the discussion in Walder, 'Workers, managers and the state: The reform era and the political crisis of 1989', *China Quarterly* 127 (September 1991), 470-473. Most of his data comes from a study of Tianjin, but as he points out, there is no reason to suppose that the situation there was atypical of urban China as a whole.

Effects of the economic reforms

As was mentioned above, it is often argued that it was the impact of continuing economic reforms which made the difference between the limited response by workers to Democracy Wall (and their lack of response to the 1986-7 student demonstrations), and their widespread and active support for the 1989 protest movement. In a survey of the reform period, the Hong Kong periodical *Mingbao Yuekan* located a crucial change in the public mood on reform taking place from early in 1987, and passing through several distinct stages until by the spring of 1989, widespread distrust of the government and pessimism about living standards, together with disgust at official corruption, formed the basis of widespread urban support for the Democracy Movement.¹³ There are several points to note with reference to public responses to reform. Firstly, we should bear in mind that before 1987, urban incomes had on the whole been rising, and that hopes were high that the success of contract responsibility in the countryside could be repeated in urban areas, resulting in a similarly striking improvement in living standards.¹⁴ Ironic echoes of the high expectations generated in the cities by the successes of land reform in the late 1940s can be detected here. By 1987 many urban citizens had come to regard rising incomes as synonymous with reform, and this posed problems for the regime when the increases faltered and in some cases went into reverse. When further price reforms were carried out in 1988 without the cushion of rising urban wages, panic-buying and runs on the banks resulted.¹⁵

The same article noted that in two 1987 surveys of public

13 'Xiwang de pomie [The shattering of hopes]', *Mingbao Yuekan* (October 1991), 24-28.

14 Ibid., 24.

15 Ibid., 27.

opinion, security was rated more important than increased individual income by most respondents¹⁶. 1987 was also the year in which the reforms began to dismantle the system of socialist welfare provision set up in the 1950s, with reforms being implemented in the areas of housing, medical care, and employment (specifically the promotion of insecure, contract employment, which implied an acceptance, for the first time since 1949, of the existence of urban unemployment as a permanent feature of the economy). We noted in the previous section how workers in the late 1970s and early 1980s perceived a possible threat to their interests and security in the calls to 'smash the iron rice-bowl', and now this threat seemed to be materializing. At the same time, the development of a 'tight money' policy through 1988 meant that by early 1989, as many as two-thirds of urban factories were running at less than full capacity, and that as a consequence, workers on short-time working, often a two- or three-day week, were not receiving their full salary, still less their usual bonuses for meeting production quotas. Many were only on 70% of their usual pay¹⁷, and in the context of further price reform and the highest inflation rates of the reform period so far, this was a major cause for complaint among workers. It is generally agreed that, mainly as a result of very high inflation, but also influenced by the prevalence of short-time working and suspension of bonuses, real urban industrial incomes actually fell slightly between the end of 1986 and the end of 1988¹⁸.

16 Ibid., 26.

17 See Willy Wo-lap Lam's article in the *South China Morning Post* (9.3.90), reproduced in *FBIS-CHI-90-047* (9.3.90), 26-27.

18 Walder, 'Workers, managers and the state', 471; Mingbao Yuekan's analysis was that 20% of urban residents experienced this drop in income, by sometimes as much as 30%, and that the fall mainly affected the lower-income stratum of society ('The shattering of hopes', 26).

Walder has argued that the main reasons for the nationwide appearance of autonomous unions in 1989, a development which had not happened as a result of any previous protest movements or unrest in urban China, were the specific impact of certain reform measures in the late 1980s (broadly as outlined above), and the temporary suspension of the normal means by which such unrest is usually suppressed; 'the division of the leadership and the temporary paralysis of its formidable apparatus of repression'.¹⁹ This is fine as far as it goes; it is clearly in keeping with the conclusions of the previous section, that workers were in part bought off by the reforms as Democracy Wall was being suppressed, and that incidents such as the formation of independent unions quickly attracted suppression by the authorities. But this view tends to down-play the extent to which previous bouts of unrest and self-organization do in fact offer a precedent for 1989. It is usually said that the independent unions formed in the early 1980s were scattered and sporadic, but in fact, we have reports of independent unions being demanded or actually formed in at least half-a-dozen Chinese cities and provinces. It is entirely possible that there were more examples of which the outside world was not aware; there were certainly strikes in most urban areas at this time. This is to say nothing of earlier examples of self-organization such as the *Pingnanhui* (grievance-redressing societies) of the Hundred Flowers period²⁰, or of the many workers' organizations formed during the Cultural Revolution.

Similarly, since the middle of 1989 industrial unrest has continued in China, and so have attempts to form independent unions.

In 1991 the Ministry of State Security was said to be investigating no less than 14 underground workers' organizations in Beijing alone, organizations each with a

19 Walder, 'Workers, managers and the state', 492.

20 Perry, 'Shanghai's strike wave of 1957', 11.

membership of between 20 and 300 workers.²¹ According to Willy Wo-lap Lam's recent account, two of these organizations modelled themselves explicitly on Solidarity, and 'vowed to form an alternative, workers-based party that championed "real democracy".' These groups were also putting out unofficial publications.²² Many more examples could be given; reports cite independent union activity in Luoyang and Zhuzhou in 1990²³, for example. One former Beijing *Gongzilian* member stated in 1993 that workers involved in the protests had continued to meet secretly after the crackdown, and that underground activities were 'well-organized'.²⁴ During 1994, attempts to register an independent union were reported²⁵. In fact, this incident was not merely another attempt to start an independent union. In March 1994 a 'League for the Protection of Working People in China' (*Laomeng*) was established. Zhou Guoqiang, Yuan Hongbing and Wang Jiaqi, who were involved in the activity surrounding the formation of *Laomeng*, were arrested in March 1994 in connection with their efforts to organize a petition to the National People's Congress demanding that the right to strike be restored to the Chinese constitution and that workers and peasants be allowed to form independent unions.²⁶

All this activity has gone on despite the state's apparatus of repression no longer being 'paralysed' (the

21 See Willy Wo-lap Lam, *China after Deng Xiaoping*, 273.

22 Ibid., 274.

23 *South China Morning Post* (9.3.90), in *FBIS-CHI-90-047* (9.3.90), 26.

24 *South China Morning Post* 25.2.93, 10.

25 *Guardian* 11-12.3.94, 15.

26 See Lam, *China after Deng Xiaoping*, 277; *Human Rights Watch Asia* 6, 2 (11.3.94), 1-2. Zhou was a founder member of Beijing *Gongzilian*, and, with Wang, had acted on behalf of exiled *Gongzilian* leader Han Dongfang in his efforts to get back into China (*Human Rights Watch Asia*, 2).

prolonged succession crisis cannot be compared to the divisions in the leadership during spring 1989). Again, Walder has argued that in enterprises, the Party is able under normal circumstances to prevent unofficial self-organization by workers and to stop organized protest or opposition among workers before it starts.²⁷ But in fact, given the evidence produced in this study showing how common such activities in factories were in the four periods of confrontation being examined, the phrase 'normal circumstances' becomes almost meaningless. What views such as Walder's lack is an appreciation of the extent to which precedents for workers' activities in 1989 did exist. Having initially been quite dismissive of the significance of the Workers' Autonomous Federations in the immediate aftermath of June 4, many commentators have since acknowledged their importance as a sign of independent political, as well as industrial, activity by workers. But, with the exception of Elizabeth Perry's recent article on the Hundred Flowers in Shanghai, they have yet to apply this new insight back to other outbreaks of protest by workers, and consequently the magnitude and significance of earlier confrontations between workers and the Party is still underestimated. 1989 is still described as a 'turning point'²⁸ or a 'new species of political protest',²⁹ and, extensive though the movement was nationally, well-supported by the urban citizenry and the centre of overseas attention, it was not completely removed from all previous outbreaks of protest, particularly with reference to workers' activities.

Similarly, the early view that workers in 1989 were

27 Walder, *Communist Neo-traditionalism*, 18-19.

28 Wang Shaoguang, 'Deng Xiaoping's reform and the Chinese workers' participation in the protest movement of 1989', *Research in Political Economy*, 13, quoted in Perry, 'Shanghai's strike wave of 1957', 3.

29 Walder and Gong, 'Workers in the Tiananmen protests', 3-4.

primarily motivated by economic grievances and 'bread-and-butter issues' has been modified to admit of more political content to workers' activities, but again, this change of view has not been tested retrospectively with reference to earlier instances of workers' involvement in protest movements. It is hoped that this study has provided considerable evidence for the political content of many workers' protests, even where these were sparked off by specific economic grievances. One clue to the political nature of workers' activities is that they have so often coincided with major upheavals elsewhere in the socialist world: Poland and Hungary in 1956-7, and Solidarity in 1980 and again in 1988-9. Internal union documents suggest that the international political upheavals beginning in 1989 were the major cause of strikes, stoppages and petitions among Chinese workers through 1989 and 1990, only in 1991 giving way to economic issues at the enterprise level as the main 'hot-spot' on which unrest was focused. It was admitted that the suppression of the Democracy Movement and the subsequent East European revolutions had had great repercussions among China's workers and had shaken the faith of some of them in the socialist system.³⁰

This brings us to the crux of the issue as to whether, and how, 1989 differed from earlier outbreaks of protest. If the 1989 Democracy Movement, with reference to workers, is properly located as the fifth in a series of worker-Party confrontations, then by examining the issues on which workers' discontent was focused in previous outbreaks we can determine how closely 1989 resembled them, and to what extent it represented a significant escalation of conflict. What was at the heart of all four bouts of unrest with which this study has been concerned was the fact that reality did not match up to workers' declared status as masters, the democratic rights in the enterprise and in wider society which they enjoyed on paper, and their avowed leading political role. Under the

30 *Gonghui Xinx* 8 (15.4.91), 28.

socialist system they were deprived of the old weapons of union organization and strikes with which they had previously defended their rights, but the new, Party-controlled unions and the institutions of democratic management which were supposed to replace these were never able to play their intended role, being easily circumvented by impatient or autocratic cadres, and soon falling into disrepute with workers because of their ineffectiveness. In an industrial system where productivity gains depended to such a great extent on increased inputs and intensification of labour, workers in some cases came to feel that they were even worse off under this type of 'socialism' than they had been working for private bosses. Some even argued that the new 'red capitalists', who monopolized the means of production through political power rather than economically, were worse than the old ones which they had replaced, since their control over workers' lives was more complete.

This gives an indication of why workers' activities in 1989 emerged so quickly throughout the country in an organized form and were such a significant part of the movement. Since 1949, workers had on more than one occasion come to doubt the validity of official arguments that independent unions and the strike weapon were unnecessary under socialism. But by the end of the 1980s, it really was no longer possible to deploy this argument, since it was obvious to every citizen that 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', or the socialist market economy, was rather more market than socialist in some respects. The government could no longer claim that workers had no need for their own unions because it already protected their interests, while at the same time undermining welfare provisions and security of employment and throwing workers on the mercy of the market. Increased enterprise autonomy also meant a weakening of direct state control over enterprise management, with contract management a case in point. As the second round of contracts was being negotiated in 1990, concerns were expressed that workers saw the contract

management as the 'owner' of the enterprise, and felt that this reform left no room for democratic management. The official trade unions pushed for regular democratic evaluation of managers by workers and for the participation of workers' congress representatives in awarding contracts and evaluating management.³¹ But the problems posed by the changing nature of state enterprise management tended to reinforce workers' feeling that their supposed democratic rights in the enterprise were a fiction.

Laomeng's petition to the NPC makes the point about the changing forms of ownership and control in the Chinese economy very clearly. Making the case for including the right to strike in the Chinese constitution, and referring specifically to the state and collective sector as well as to other forms of ownership, Laomeng put forward the following argument:

At the present time, China is in a difficult process of evolving from a planned economy into a market economy. Individual ownership by private citizens, enterprises owned by foreign capital and joint ventures will constitute an ever-growing proportion in the system of multiple forms of ownership. The mechanism of operation of the state and collective enterprises will also undergo significant changes. ... Confronted with capitalist owners and their managers, workers and employees can only protect their own interests by invoking the specific rights of citizens bestowed upon them by law. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Unrestrained wealth will also alienate into a source of social injustice. And the citizens' rights - the right to strike included - constitute a basic factor restraining the unjust use of wealth. Once the working people lose these rights, their fate is dominated by the

31 See for example *Gonghui Xinxi* 21 (1.11.90), 22-25; 3 (1.2.91), 18-19; 7 (1.4.91), 9.

capitalist owners and their managers. It will be difficult for them to safeguard their rights and interests effectively by legal means. The use of capital will be unrestricted. Under these circumstances, violations of the rights and interests of the working people will become unavoidable, and conditions will worsen. Society will be tragically split into violent non-legal conflicts.

In order to maintain stable development of society, we therefore put forward the following proposal: Adopt a constitutional amendment to amend Article 35 of the Constitution as follows: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, of demonstration, and of strike."³²

Workers' complaints about enterprise organization and management conduct in the early 1990s often bear a striking resemblance to those first voiced in the 1950s. After 1989 we still find reports of workers being excluded from participation in management because managers thought they weren't capable of effective participation. Where this happened, the official unions responded in terms which could have been lifted straight out of a summer 1950 report on democratic management, re-stating the argument that workers would only learn to participate effectively in management if they were actually allowed to participate, and that although they might not know about all sections of the enterprise and its activities, they did have expertise in specific areas and practical knowledge, and collectively they were extremely important to the successful functioning of the enterprise. Clearly the case for democratic management was having to be made all over again, and this time managers grown accustomed

32 *Human Rights Watch Asia* 6, 2 (11.3.94), 7.

in the reform period to asserting their right to manage seem to have been even less receptive to it than their 1950s counterparts, who at least were obliged to pay lip-service to democratic ideals on ideological grounds.³³ References abound also to one-man management and to the difficulties workers faced in exercising their democratic rights under the factory director responsibility system; to the prevalence of the 'hired hand' and 'work according to pay' mentality among workers; and to widespread worker discontent over unfair distribution, with particular reference to undemocratic or corrupt wage and bonus decisions being taken by managers without consulting the workers' congress, in contravention of the Enterprise Law.³⁴

Not only had the complaints of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s not gone away, but workers even seem to have felt that the reforms had actually weakened their position further, despite the fact that their status as masters of the enterprise and provisions for democratic management were now laid down in the Enterprise Law and other legislation. One reason for this was that the reform of industrial management had given so much power to the factory director (as opposed to the Party secretary), while the official unions were as ineffectual as ever in enforcing workers' rights. During 1990 the unions, who had offered tentative support to the Democracy Movement but were subsequently brought back under tighter Party control, complained that they were being treated as a work department of the Party Committee in enterprises, and that they were thus unable to do much more than make sympathetic noises when workers brought them their problems. Consequently, they reported, the workers whose interests they

33 Comments on this kind of management attitude and conduct can be found in *Gongren Ribao* 25.7.89, 3; 8.8.89, 3; 22.8.89, 2; *Gonghui Xinx* 2 (15.1.91), 30; 3 (1.2.91), 18-19; and 8 (15.4.91), 7-8.

34 See *Gongren Ribao* 25.7.89, 3 (2 articles); 8.8.89, 3; *Gonghui Xinx* 18 (15.9.90), 8-9; 2 (15.1.91), 30; 3 (1.2.91), 18-19; and 8 (15.4.91), 7-8.

were unable to protect tended to reject the Party's slogan of 'relying on the working class' as mere words.³⁵

It has been noted that immediately after the 1989 Democracy Movement, the Party 'tried to win the workers' loyalty by apparently re-establishing their position as the "premier" class in China',³⁶ and stressed that the working class had in fact remained loyal during the upheaval and had helped to restore stability subsequently, a view of events which does not tally with the reality of Chinese workers' involvement in the protests. But it seems that in spite of the Party's efforts, workers remained distinctly unimpressed with rhetoric about their leading position as long as they had no effective union representation and no say in management. On top of this, many state enterprises in particular were running at reduced capacity in the early 1990s, resulting in lay-offs and pay cuts for workers, so the economic benefits of reform were also in doubt by this point. The economic difficulties of state workers mean that they are now a relatively disadvantaged group within the workforce as a whole, and consequently they have been more prominent in recent unrest than they were in the mid-1950s or the Cultural Revolution.

So the issues behind workers' protests in 1989 and since can in most cases be traced back to earlier confrontations between workers and the Party, with some grievances going right back to the early post-liberation period. However, 1989 can be seen as an escalation in workers' anti-Party and anti-government protests in some respects, because the Workers' Autonomous Federations and other independent unions of 1989 were not confined to a single enterprise or work unit; existed in every major Chinese city and in some smaller ones as well; often had quite large registered memberships; and played a

35 *Gonghui Xinxi* 18 (15.9.90), 8-9.

36 Lam, *China after Deng Xiaoping*, 273.

prominent public role, carrying their banners in mass demonstrations that were seen by millions. Earlier escalations in protests and organizational developments have already been noted from one major period of confrontation to the next: for example, the *Pingnanhui* of the 1950s were confined to a single enterprise, while during the Cultural Revolution large-scale workers' organizations were formed crossing industrial and geographical boundaries, providing a precedent of national networks which was then used by worker-activists in the Democracy Wall Movement. Similarly, the official unions were cast aside in the mid-1950s, attacked and temporarily removed from the scene during the Cultural Revolution, and replaced with workers' own organizations during the Democracy Wall Movement and again in 1989.

The Workers' Autonomous Federations were very explicit about their political role, but then, some of the unofficial journals' comments on the prospects for a Chinese Solidarity in the early 1980s had also demonstrated an awareness that any independent workers' organization in China would be a political organization, a quasi-political party.

It is also possible that because of a lack of detailed information we have underestimated the number and spread of earlier independent unions. However, on the whole 1989 does seem to have constituted an escalation in workers' protests, because independent unions were so widespread and were given so much attention. Of course, the very fact that an outbreak of opposition is not the first of its kind can lead to an escalation of protests, as an awareness exists that issues have been raised and concessions demanded before, but to no avail. It is true that by the end of the 1980s, Party prestige was at an all-time low, and that this had something to do with the scale of the protests and the rapidity of the development of a mass movement. But despite these features of the 1989 movement, workers were moved to protest then over essentially the same issues as in the four previous confrontations, and so the degree of continuity between these confrontations, and therefore the existence of some sort of

precedent for workers' activities in 1989, should not be forgotten.

LIST OF CHINESE NEWSPAPERS

<i>Beijing Ribao</i>	Beijing Daily
<i>Gongren Ribao</i>	Workers' Daily [national]
<i>Guangming Ribao</i>	Bright Daily [national]
<i>Guangzhou Ribao</i>	Guangzhou Daily
<i>Jiefang Ribao</i>	Liberation Daily (Shanghai)
<i>Jiefangjun Bao</i>	Liberation Army Daily [national]
<i>Nanfang Ribao</i>	Southern Daily (Guangdong)
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	People's Daily [national]
<i>Xinjiang Ribao</i>	Xinjiang Daily

MONITORING SERVICES AND PRESS DIGESTS

<i>China News Analysis</i>	CNA
<i>China Report - Economic Affairs</i>	CREA
<i>Extracts from China Mainland Magazines</i>	ECMM
<i>Foreign Broadcast Information Service - China</i>	FBIS-CHI
<i>News from Provincial Radio Stations</i>	NPRS
<i>Survey of China Mainland Magazines</i>	SCMM
<i>Survey of China Mainland Press</i>	SCMP
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<i>Union Research Service</i>	URS

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