

China's Ruling Party Cancels Maoist Gatherings on Cultural Revolution Anniversary

Websites and groups have been ordered to cancel any face-to-face gatherings marking the anniversary, as the authorities move to minimize any challenge to the current leadership.

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A photo of a recent leftist dinner party marking the 30th anniversary of the death of Mao's wife and Gang of Four leader Jiang Qing.

The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has canceled a conference of prominent Maoist ideologists ahead of its 100th centenary, suggesting that CCP leader Xi Jinping is unwilling to allow the faction to increase its power base in a possible challenge to his "core" leadership.

While many commentators have noted an apparent shift towards political practises and ideological tropes that echo the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) under late supreme leader Mao Zedong in recent years, it appears that Xi is unwilling to allow actual Maoists free rein under his rule.

A conference titled "Commemorating the 55th Anniversary of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution" had been scheduled for Sunday, marking the May 16 directive that launched a decade of street fighting, violent "struggle sessions" and arbitrary denunciation in kangaroo courts on Mao's China.

However, it was suddenly canceled at short notice, and with scant explanation, according to Chinese scholar Li Gang.

"The activities that had been planned by the Maoist left to commemorate the Cultural Revolution have been stopped," Li told RFA. "Judging from various indicators, it is likely that the CCP ordered this."

Maoist, leftist websites and groups like Hongzhan, Practical Communism, Utopia, the Mao Zedong Thought Banner, Mao Zedong Research Institute, the Protagonist, The Red Song Society had all said they would take part in the canceled conference.

But sources said that Zhang Zhang, one of the organizers, was contacted by police on Saturday and told to call it off.

Rounding up people

Zhang told Hong Kong's pro-China Singtao Daily newspaper on Sunday that all offline meetings had been canceled, as it was "inconvenient" to go ahead, owing to poor attendance.

Asked if he had been ordered to cancel, he told the paper: "Either way, it's canceled, so what does it matter?"

Beijing-based political journalist Gao Yu said via Twitter that a wider crackdown is under way on any face-to-face meetings linked to the Cultural Revolution.

"They have rounded up and prevented people from attending around a dozen different meetings and dinner gatherings," Gao wrote.

According to Li Gang, the Cultural Revolution is still contested political ground, with the party under Xi recently changing the official description of the era to minimize Mao's responsibility for the bloodshed and social chaos.

"Does this cancellation mean that the authorities have changed course and stopped trying to reverse the official verdict on the Cultural Revolution?" Li said. "I don't think it does."

"Actually, everything [Xi's administration] has been doing in the past few years has mimicked what happened in the Cultural Revolution," he said. "The leadership is actually taking us backwards, and traveling the same old road once more."

Factional strife

The cancellation came after photos of a 30th anniversary party marking the death of Mao's wife and Gang of Four leader Jiang Qing, featuring a young woman in red apparently representing Jiang.

China's Maoist left straddles the established party and unofficial activism alike, and, as such, isn't an entirely controllable quantity.

Leftists, including dozens of young labor activists who tried to set up an independent labor union at the Jasic Technology factory in Shenzhen in 2018, have been detained, placed under house arrest, and silenced as part of the CCP's "stability maintenance" regime.

A media worker surnamed Tang said the CCP actually has plenty to gain from allowing a certain amount of factional strife, however.

"They are actually inciting the struggle between the so-called left and right-wing factions, and adding fuel to the flames," Tang said. "Actually they are allowing history to repeat itself."

"They are allowing [this struggle] to do their dirty work for them, the work of those in power, so as to terrorize the population into staying silent," he said.

The website of Hongzhan.org was inaccessible from the U.K. on Monday, returning the message "This website is

temporarily unavailable for failing to file an application in accordance with relevant laws of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology."

Reported by Qiao Long and Man Hoi Yan for RFA's Mandarin and Cantonese Services. Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.

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