

October 12, 2006

China Makes Commitment to Social Harmony

By [JOSEPH KAHN](#)

BEIJING, Oct. 11 — [China's](#) Communist Party, devoted in recent years to expanding the economy at any cost, on Wednesday endorsed a new doctrine that puts more emphasis on tackling the severe side effects of unrestrained growth.

The annual meeting of the ruling party's Central Committee formally adopted President [Hu Jintao's](#) proposal to "build a harmonious socialist society," a move some analysts said was one of most decisive shifts in the party's thinking since [Deng Xiaoping](#) accelerated the push for high growth rates in the early 1990's.

The leadership declared that a range of social concerns, including the surging wealth gap, corruption, pollution and access to education and medical care, must be placed on a par with economic growth in party theory and government policy.

"There are many conflicts and problems affecting social harmony," the Central Committee said in a statement released Wednesday after the close of its four-day planning session. "Our party has to be more proactive in recognizing and dissolving these contradictions."

China's economy has recently been expanding at better than 10 percent annually, faster than any other major economy in the world, and the party shows no signs of trying to sharply reduce that rate soon.

China needs much higher growth rates than most developed countries to absorb tens of millions of surplus workers, and even the plans for addressing environmental woes and creating a sounder welfare system assume surging tax revenues to pay for them.

"A harmonious society above all needs development," the statement said.

But the "harmonious society" theme contains a multitude of political positions that reflect Mr. Hu's agenda as he has consolidated his power.

He has campaigned doggedly to reduce the party's addiction to state-backed investment projects,

politically driven expansion of industry and infrastructure and conversion of state-owned land for speculative real estate development. The fear is that many such projects generate poor economic returns and add to China's pollution, already among the worst in the world.

Local officials have tended to ignore central directives on creating a more sustainable and less speculation-driven economy, partly because they still believe that they will not be promoted unless they can show stellar production results in their domains.

Officials have also used their access to state money and loans from state-owned banks to pour investment into projects that benefit themselves or their friends and family members. Vital sectors such as finance, transportation and energy remain closely held by party-appointed officials and the children of the elite.

Hand-in-hand with the "harmonious society" drive, Mr. Hu and Zeng Qinghong, the vice president and the leader of the party's secretariat, have undertaken the most sustained crackdown on official corruption since the party first embraced market-oriented economic measures nearly three decades ago.

The anticorruption sweep has already resulted in the detention of Chen Liangyu, the powerful party boss of Shanghai, as well as senior officials in Beijing, Tianjin, Fujian, Hunan and other places.

But party officials acknowledge that corruption is endemic in the one-party system. The mass accumulation of wealth by people who have political power has helped transform China from one of the most egalitarian societies in the world to one of the most unequal, with a yawning urban-rural wealth gap.

Because many people believe that wealth flows from access to power more than it does from talent or risk-taking, the wealth gap has incited outrage and is viewed as at least partly responsible for tens of thousands of mass protests around the country in recent years.

The Central Committee statement did not commit the leadership to specific targets in reducing the gap beyond stating that it would need to see improvement by the year 2020.

But analysts say the new platform should result in significant increases in government spending on education and health care, which tend to be expensive and inaccessible to peasants, migrant workers and retirees, who make up the overwhelming majority of China's population.

Energy efficiency and pollution controls have also become a greater policy focus, though experts say there are still few signs that party leaders have the resolve to fight pollution at the expense of growth.

“For most of the past 15 years, the leadership has put G.D.P. growth above everything else,” said Mao Shoulong, a public policy expert at People’s University. “Now, they want to make G.D.P. one of a series of social priorities that will determine whether or not you get promoted.”

Mr. Mao said Mr. Hu would probably continue to face obstacles in putting his plans into effect. Among the problems are that government revenues as a share of the total economy remain relatively low. Local officials still care far more about generating growth than abstract goals like social equality.

“China is still a poor country that faces many of the problems of rich countries with far more resources,” Mr. Mao said. “It is not so easy to change the focus of the leadership at this stage of development.”

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