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China's Party Leadership Declares New Priority: 'Harmonious Society'

Doctrine Proposed By President Hu Formally Endorsed

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BEIJING, Oct. 11 -- [China's](#) Communist Party on Wednesday formally endorsed a political doctrine laid out by President Hu Jintao that calls for the creation of a "harmonious society," a move that further signaled a shift in the party's focus from promoting all-out economic growth to solving worsening social tensions.

The endorsement, made at a closed-door plenary session held by the party's Central Committee, underlined Hu's increasing power. It effectively enshrined his doctrine in the same pantheon as those of Mao Zedong and other predecessors.

China's leaders have become concerned in recent years about problems tied to the country's blistering economic growth. Anger over a growing gap between rich and poor and an inadequate social security system is feared to threaten the party's stability. Retirees increasingly cannot live on their pensions, crime and divorce rates have escalated, and clashes have broken out between security forces and farmers whose fields and villages have been swallowed by development.

The four-day plenary session, which ended Wednesday, was the first in 25 years to focus on social issues rather than on economic or political development.

"This plenary is where the pedal hits the metal," said Kenneth G. Lieberthal, a former Clinton administration official who is now a professor of political science at the University of Michigan. "Hu now wants to get formal endorsement of a set of priorities that will focus both on rapid growth and on ameliorating some of these problems. He is saying, 'This is what I stand for. These are the directions in which I will guide China.' "

A statement released after the plenary said: "China is a harmonious society in general, but there are many conflicts and problems affecting social harmony. We must always remain clear-headed and be vigilant even in tranquil times."

The document was also aimed at setting the agenda for next year's party congress, a meeting at which Hu is likely to indicate who will succeed him. The 17th Party Congress will meet in Beijing in late 2007.

In recent months, authorities have responded to social unrest by tightening controls, drafting laws that clamp down on the news media and launching a high-profile campaign against corruption.

Last month, the Communist Party chief of Shanghai was fired for allegedly helping loot the city's pension fund of hundreds of millions of dollars. Chen Liangyu, a protege of Hu's predecessor, Jiang Zemin, was the first member of the 24-member Politburo to lose his job since 1995.

Analysts have speculated that Chen was targeted because he and other proteges of Jiang advocated unfettered

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economic growth.

Experts said this year's plenary session was especially significant because initiatives in areas such as health, education and social welfare were more dramatic and comprehensive than usual. The session also focused on rural unrest and the environment.

"Hu has devoted more resources to rural China than was the case five years ago. He has begun to devote serious financial resources to infrastructure projects designed to address environmental degradation," said Lieberthal, who cautioned that the measures appeared to be preliminary.

Hu's plan calls for significant progress by 2020 in narrowing the wealth gap, increasing employment, improving public service and protecting the environment.

Chinese scholars often worry that the country suffers from an eroding system of beliefs and a lack of common aspirations and values. To help build a new values system, the party's objective "is to try to perfect the socialist democratic legal system," one in which "the rule of law is to be carried out completely, and people's interests and rights are to be respected and guaranteed," the plenary statement said.

Critics said the statement was meaningless.

"Harmonious society means nobody opposes me. No different ideas," said a political analyst in Beijing who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. "If you talk to farmers, you will know what harmonious society means. They're angry. That's why the party needs to crack down. With money, law, jail -- anything in order to reach one society without any conflicts.

"It's propaganda. It's nothing. . . . We Chinese don't believe in these slogans anymore."

But Huang Weiding, deputy editor in chief of the Red Flag Publishing House, insisted that gradual change was occurring and that there was now greater focus on the party system rather than on the power of individual leaders.

"China is such a vast country. There are several million party cadres. How will we unify their thoughts? We need theory," Huang said. "These are not just slogans, they are our goals."

Researchers Jin Ling and Li Jie contributed to this report.

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