

A commentary by Bao Tong

This notion of socialism with Chinese characteristics (ChiSoc for short) is an important one.

Any Chinese citizen who doesn't comply with the rules of ChiSoc can end up without a household registration in life, and without a burial site in death.

Foreigners who haven't been initiated into its mysteries will keep blindly running into walls if they want to have dealings with Chinese people.

ChiSoc used to be something of a riddle that could only be understood by the creme de la creme of Chinese society. Very few people outside the political establishment knew its true meaning.

But all that has changed with the 2018 constitutional amendments. Now, the true nature of ChiSoc has been made clear for all to see: "The essential distinguishing feature of ChiSoc is the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party."

This is entirely correct. All of the main characteristics of our society can be traced back to the leadership of the party.

Millions die

For example, why did tens of millions of rural residents die in this country during the three-year famines of 1959-1961? Because party leaders needed to take away all of their grain to enable the steel industry to double its output to 10.7 million tons a year.

Why did the party leaders need to make so much steel? Because we had to surpass the United

Kingdom and catch up with America, whatever it took.

Why did we have to overtake Britain and catch up to the United States? Because the Chinese Communist Party was determined, by hook or by crook, to be the world leaders of socialism.

Why did the party do nothing to prevent the huge loss of life from hunger? Because it had decided that tens of millions of people starving to death was a small price to pay for being the top socialist country in the world.

Another example: how did ChiSoc manage, in a sight that was shocking to behold, to create such a yawning chasm between rich and poor in the most effective manner, and in the shortest possible time?

Party corruption

Why did Yang Gailan [a resident of the northwestern province of Gansu], in a state of utter exhaustion, take her own life [and that of her family] to put an end to their hunger? And why are some people (such as those with the surname Jiang) in possession of hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars when they are still in the flower of their youth?

Because the party leaders aren't interested in the low-end population. Instead, they are rather keen on [Deng Xiaoping's maxim]: "Let some people get rich first if they have the ability to do so."

And of course, it's those with close ties to the party leadership who tend to have this kind of luck in the first place.

Yet another example: Why has China only managed to rid itself of tigers or flies [large and small-scale corrupt officials] selectively? Because ChiSoc's body politic is festering with corruption from the roots of its hair to the soles of its feet. Nowhere is free of it.

And why is that? Because under ChiSoc, all economic activity, just like social activity, has to be approved by party leaders.

This means that party leaders are rent-seekers to whom all must apply, from the smallest roadside stallholder to the company wanting to list on the stockmarket, from business owners needing a license to those needing loans or investment, from the acquisition of land to the hiring of labor, from suppliers, to production, to sales, to inspections, to lawsuits.

There is a huge bundle of applications to be made and approvals to be obtained at every juncture; the party will have its dues paid, willy nilly, for this is the party leaders' own playground; the place where they engage in extortion, exploitation and mass murder.

From the lowest-ranking village official to the leaders and deputy leaders of our country, this model is ubiquitous, and its stain soaks through everything, though some presumably try to keep their hands clean.

If we were to tear away the last shred of modesty, tell me: would there be a clean patch of earth left anywhere? Somewhere to build a shrine to truth and justice?

It's no surprise that the party leaders pretend not to have noticed the revelations made in the Panama Papers, and by [exiled billionaire] Guo Wengui.

Corruption, of course, isn't limited to economic activity. Some party leaders have extended their feelers into everything, like a mass of bloodsucking insects.

Social actions like being born, moving to live in a city, graduating, finding a job, or getting access to healthcare, can all suddenly meet with unexpected disaster.

Rent seeking

Much as in the economic sphere, the right of appeal or redress exists in name only, and the rules of the game are anything but fair and just. Everything depends on applications and approvals, and on rent-seeking wherever we turn.

The promotion of any party, government or military official ... is subject to the rules of horse-trading that goes along with the buying and selling of official positions. It is here that we see the true depth and ubiquity of corruption in China.

So yes, the tragic history of tens of millions of deaths by starvation, the current social divide, and the dark curtain of corruption overshadowing the entire country can all be traced back to the comprehensive and profound nature of the party's leadership.

And I think it is still correct to say that the essential distinguishing feature of ChiSoc is the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Bao Tong, former political aide to the late ousted premier Zhao Ziyang, is under continual surveillance and frequent house arrest at his home in Beijing.

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