

1960

As the Great Leap Forward (GLF) ended in catastrophe, leaders of the Chinese Communist Party took a step back from the policies that caused the tragic famine that killed tens of millions and brought the country's economy to the brink of collapse. From late 1961, industrial relations in China began to be regulated by a new document entitled 'Regulation of Tasks in State-Owned Industrial Enterprises (Draft)' (most commonly known as the 'Seventy Articles', adopted on 15 September 1961). The new policy spelled the abandonment of the 'mass line' and the return to a management model based on the authority of the factory director, assisted by administrative and technical staff, which had been heatedly contested during the strike wave of 1956 and 1957. Concurrently, the material incentives that had been disdainfully discarded under the GLF were reinstated, albeit for a limited number of groups of unionised workers in state-owned enterprises. However, while these policies were consistently implemented until the eruption of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, not everyone in the Party's top leadership was ready to abandon the 'mass line' that had driven the GLF. Mao Zedong himself never hid his opposition to this reorganisation of labour relations—a position he made abundantly clear in 1960 when he publicly endorsed the so-called Angang Constitution. This document laid out the principles of putting politics in command of enterprises, assigning a stronger role to the Party in management, resorting to mass mobilisation within companies, blurring the boundaries between workers, technicians and managers, and pushing for technological revolution. The Seventy Articles and the Angang Constitution became the core documents in a 'struggle between two lines' in industry that would last into the reform era. This essay examines the local and national political dynamics at play behind the scenes in Mao's adoption of the Angang Constitution.

The Angang Constitution: Labour, Industry and Bureaucracy during the Great Leap Forward

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On 22 March 1960, at the height of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), Mao Zedong read a report about the Anshan Iron and Steel Works (鞍山钢铁公司), also known as Angang (鞍钢), written by the Anshan City Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the spirit of the GLF, the report argued that revolutionary spirit and mass campaigns could help industrialise China. It confirmed Mao's extremist policy line in opposition to a more moderate line: 'It is necessary to continue an ideological revolution [思想革命] without a break, maintain political leadership, totally eliminate superstitions, and liberate ideology.'¹ The report from Anshan pleased Chairman Mao, who commented: 'This ... report is very good. The more I read it, the happier I become. I don't think it is too long.'² The importance of this document lay in the fact that Angang was the single largest enterprise in what at that time was the most important industrial sector in the People's Republic of China (PRC): steel-making. Reading it, Mao was excited to see his vision—industrialisation through unleashing the power of the masses—confirmed by the nation's most important state-owned enterprise (SOE).

Importantly, the report from Anshan also symbolised the end of an era in Chinese socialism—the period of building socialism by imitating Stalinism, which was best represented by the construction of new plants at Angang with the help of Soviet engineers during the First Five-Year Plan (1953–57). Aware of this change, Mao commented on the report:

In the past, they thought that this enterprise [Angang] was already modernised and did not need the so-called technological revolution. They opposed implementing mass campaigns ... They regarded the 'Magnitogorsk Constitution [马钢宪法]' [an authoritative method for managing a large steel enterprise in the Soviet Union] as sacred and absolute ... This report [of March 1960] is

more advanced. It is not the Magnitogorsk Constitution. It created the Angang Constitution [鞍钢宪法]. The Angang Constitution was born in the Far East, in China.³

Mao gave the report a charming new title, the ‘Angang Constitution’, the name under which the document would be circulated in the thousands during the Cultural Revolution.

Mao’s approval of the technological innovation outlined in the Angang Constitution excited Angang’s workers. Although in all likelihood the constitution was not published in newspapers or other media at that time, according to Anshan’s official local history, its content was orally communicated in meetings. By the end of March 1960, about 90 percent of the staff and workers at Angang had heard about Mao’s comments.⁴ According to a CCP internal report, the workers of Angang favourably compared the present situation as described in the Angang Constitution with the past, when their workplace was controlled by the managers. A number of workers proclaimed that, before the revolution, everything had been done ‘just as the factory director says,’ but now ‘our thought had been liberated greatly, and the rightists had been wiped away.’⁵

Reflecting the official Party line, conventional Chinese scholarship regarded the Angang Constitution as evidence of genuine grassroots efforts to create new forms of socialist factory management, and at least some of these efforts were successful.⁶ Criticising this interpretation, some revisionist historians have claimed instead that the Angang Constitution was mere propaganda created by the CCP’s top-down policies.⁷ While I agree with the latter view—that the Angang Constitution was a work of propaganda—in this essay, I also show that its creation involved complex local political dynamics. The Angang Constitution was shaped not only by a diktat from the central state authority, but also by the political ambitions of local officials who tried to make use of the state’s campaigns and discourse for their own interests.

Local Politics

Though it was called the Angang Constitution, the report actually was not produced by Angang itself; the document was drafted by the Anshan City Party Committee, Angang’s local political rival. The leader of the City Committee at the time was First Secretary Yang Shijie, an experienced Party cadre with little experience in industry. In the first years of the PRC,

Yang played an active role in land reform, the ‘Resist America Aid Korea Campaign’ (抗美援朝运动) and the ‘Suppress Counterrevolutionaries Campaign’ (镇压反革命运动).⁸

The making of the Angang Constitution reflected the enhanced power of local governments vis-a-vis SOEs like Angang. During the First Five-Year Plan, the economic policymaking of the PRC was largely centralised in the hands of industrial ministries and bureaus in Beijing. In 1958, however, Mao took the planning power from the hands of bureaucrats in the capital and turned it over to provincial Party secretaries.⁹ Mao’s localism was also associated with anti-technocratic, egalitarian ideals. While criticising Soviet texts on economics in 1959 and 1960, Mao stressed the importance of reforming the management system of SOEs by levelling the relationship between cadres, technological experts and workers:

It is necessary for leaders [of SOEs] to treat people equally ... When it comes to the management of enterprises, it is necessary ... to make worker-masses, leading cadres, and technical staff unite with each other such that cadres will participate in [political] campaigns, workers will participate in management, and inappropriate rules and systems will be reformed constantly.¹⁰

Newly empowered local cadres mobilised workers and encouraged them to take command of factories. Workers’ initiatives in technological innovation were highly praised and SOE managers and engineers were required to learn from workers. Local cadres even attempted to give equal status to workers and better-educated managers and engineers.

Local city officials like Yang Shijie made use of the GLF to politically attack SOE managers and engineers and thus assert stronger control over enterprises like Angang. In Anshan, the GLF was implemented by combining the production forces of the large modern enterprises and small, mass-based facilities. At a Party conference in March 1959, First Secretary Yang stressed the importance of concurrently developing small furnaces and Angang, which he called, respectively, ‘small, local-origin facilities’ (小土羣) and ‘huge, foreign-origin facilities’ (大洋羣). According to him, the achievement of the GLF in steel production in Anshan in 1958 was made possible not only by Angang, but also from the 270,000 tonnes of ‘local steel’ (土钢) produced by small furnaces and by the new facilities at Angang built by local enterprises.¹¹

During the GLF, the Anshan City Party Committee pressured Angang into taking a more ambitious attitude. On 27 April 1958, the committee produced the 'Five-Year Leap Plan' (五年跃进计划), which outlined ambitious goals for the development of Angang.¹² That day, the City Committee also decided that the goal of the GLF in Anshan was to 'complete the General Line, make efforts for five years, dramatically liberate thoughts, make cadres both red and expert, save half of investment, let all the people work for industry, and build "small Angang[s]"'.¹³ In a meeting of the Anshan City Party Committee on 18 October 1960, the Secretary of the Liaoning Provincial Party Committee stated: 'Right now, the entire country is looking at the Northeast. The Northeast is looking at Angang. Simply speaking, the entire country is looking at Angang.'¹⁴

Just as Mao's anti-technocratic, decentralised vision during the GLF strengthened local CCP organisations' influence over SOEs, reports from local CCP organisations in industrial bases like Anshan also helped Mao consolidate his position within the top leadership. On 25 July 1959, the Liaoning Provincial Party Committee forwarded to the Party centre a report by the Anshan City Committee on production and mass mobilisation in Anshan. The report from Anshan pleased Chairman Mao, who then circulated it with his comments among CCP leaders.¹⁵

Mao's reference to Angang legitimated and empowered the Anshan City Committee to complete its ambitious goals for steel production. In a speech in August 1959, First Secretary Yang Shijie used Mao's statement to buttress the City Committee's authority: 'We think the instruction of the central leadership and Chairman Mao perfectly match the current reality of our city ... [I]t has given us great forces and sharp weapons with which we will oppose rightist deviations and go all out.'¹⁶ With Mao's imprimatur, Yang framed the GLF as 'the process of struggling with rightist, conservative thought'. In his view, problems in Angang's operations were 'inseparable from the rightist thought of some cadres' who cast doubt on the GLF by pointing out its shortcomings and arguing for lower goals. Instead, Angang's industrial production would increase only when 'advanced thought takes command, and the fighting spirit of the masses becomes high'. He stressed how Chairman Mao thought highly of the City Committee's leadership over Angang:

[T]he Chairman commented on the report by us, the Anshan City Committee, because we are the nation's largest steel enterprise ... We definitely must reply to the Chairman's words by completing

the production plan in an impressive way, prove the correctness of the Party's General Line, and protect the General Line through the real action in the Great Leap Forward of steel production.

In this way, Angang became a part of the 'we' (我们) of the collective directed by the City Committee.

Mass Mobilisation

Besides Mao's endorsement, another important source of power for the City Committee was its role as a local-level organiser of the mass mobilisation campaigns initiated by the chairman. On 23 August 1958, the Anshan City Party Committee and the City Government convened a meeting with 25,000 people to launch the 'leap' in steel production in the city. On 1 September 1958, the City Party Committee circulated instructions from the CCP's national leadership at a meeting of all the city's Party cadres to begin a campaign to save electricity and dig up abandoned steel.¹⁷

Local CCP committee cadres also mobilised workers against SOE managers and engineers. The City Committee, together with the Angang Party Committee, blasted Angang's managers and engineers as 'the major obstacle' (主要障碍).¹⁸ In October 1958, the City Committee launched a 'Pull Out White Flags' campaign (拔白旗运动) at Angang. In a meeting at the Iron-Making Factory, the factory director and an engineer were criticised for their 'rightist conservative thought' (右倾保守思想). The campaign then spread to other parts of Angang.¹⁹ By the end of 1958, thirty-nine factory directors and chiefs and 109 lower-level managers had been punished, some of them fired. In February 1960, Deputy Director of Angang, Ma Bin, was also criticised for his 'rightist thought'.²⁰

Local CCP cadres also condemned the previous management system that had given managers a dominant status within SOEs—the so-called one-chief system (一长制) that had originated in the Soviet Union. Under this system, SOE managers such as factory directors had almost total control over all employees within their workplaces, while local cadres such as the secretaries of the Party committees played only a supporting role. Even though the CCP had abandoned the one-chief system in 1956, local cadres attacked the existing power of the SOE cadres as the 'remnant influence' (残余影响) of this Soviet-style management system. In March 1959, Yang Shijie stated that the 'unified leadership by the Party' (党的一元化领导) of industrial enterprises was the foundation of the

success of the GLF. The unified leadership of the Party within enterprises had been strengthened since 1956 along with the introduction of a 'director responsibility system under the leadership of the Party committee' (党委领导下的厂长负责制), in place of the one-chief system. Yet, the attack on the one-chief system had not been thorough enough, and it was claimed that the 'remnant influence of the one-chief system still exists in many factories and mines'.²¹ By criticising the workplace mentality that reinforced the status of SOE managers and engineers, local governments tried to educate SOEs in an effort to justify a new workplace order in which CCP local organisations took command.

According to the Party Committee of Angang's Steel Mill No. 2: '[S]ome cadres stubbornly hold up the one-chief system and oppose the Party's leadership and the escalation of mass campaigns'.²² They further criticised these SOE cadres for thinking that 'the Party committee does not understand technology' and that 'the Party cannot guide enterprise'. Therefore, the Factory Party Committee decided to target factory directors in an anti-rightist rectification campaign. On 9 November 1959, Secretary Jin of the Factory Party Committee explained the purpose of the campaign. They split the participants into several discussion groups. The assembly first thoroughly criticised a team leader named Jin (not the Party Committee secretary). During the criticism, a leader of another team with the surname Liu challenged the rectification campaign by defending Jin, which resulted in a 'concentrated criticism and struggle' (重点批判和斗争) against Liu as well. Criticism and struggle against Jin and Liu lasted about one month. Overall, these campaigns constituted a serious and dynamic 'education in the General Line and education in Party-ness' (总路线教育和党性教育) targeting a wide range of managers and engineers.²³

Mobilisation of workers during the GLF was also aimed at strengthening solidarity among workers within the same workplace. In the early and mid-1950s, under the one-chief system, work was atomised into small parts and workers were held individually responsible only for the piece of work allocated to them. During the GLF, however, at least some factories at Angang promoted the idea that workers were collectively responsible for the work of the entire workplace. For instance, steelworker Han of the first open-hearth furnace of Angang's No. 1 Steelworks made a proposal to abolish the division of workers into groups for the purpose of overcoming 'sectionalism' (本位主义). In its place, he argued that they should set up a 'small commune' (小公社) for the entire open-hearth furnace,

in which all the tools were shared and the salary was equally distributed to all the workers. By this system, the furnaces would purportedly be better protected.²⁴

The Angang Constitution was born from the mutually reinforcing relationship between Chairman Mao and the Anshan City Party Committee. Mao's policy was supported by certain segments of the local bureaucracy, including Anshan city officials like Yang Shijie. Unsurprisingly, Mao's support for the Angang Constitution further enhanced the City Committee's power in Anshan. After Mao's praise of the committee's report, it held three standing committee meetings and decided to implement a mass campaign to read Mao's writings and to further intensify the campaign for technological innovation and technological revolution. Between 11 April and 15 April 1960, the City Committee held a representative meeting, in which Yang Shijie stressed that it was necessary to criticise the one-chief system, eliminate the Magnitogorsk Constitution, establish the Angang Constitution and realise the goal of producing 6.55 million tonnes of steel.²⁵

A Rebuttal

Despite its name, the Angang Constitution was actually a rebuttal of what Angang had originally represented: a Soviet-style technocratic management system tethered to the vertical line of control from the industrial ministry in Beijing. In a dramatic rupture from the centralised policymaking of the previous period, Mao empowered local Party organisations and cadres. The GLF strengthened the horizontal leadership of the city over Angang through the network of local cadres based in Party committees within individual factories. Making use of the chairman's new agenda, Party committees in provinces, cities and towns wrested control of SOEs in their jurisdictions away from industrial ministries in Beijing. Local cadres also strengthened their leadership by mobilising workers within factories and promoting the cult of the people's role in technological issues.

China's growth out of the Soviet model is clearly distilled in the 'Angang Constitution'. During the First Five-Year Plan, Angang served as a symbol of China's friendship with the 'Soviet Big Brother' (苏联老大哥), with its new plants built according to Soviet designs, its use of Soviet machines and the help given by Soviet engineers. Yet, in 1960, Chairman Mao provided Angang with a new, opposing role as a symbol of China's departure from

Soviet socialism. While the Angang Constitution was sidelined for a few years after the GLF, it was soon resurrected during the Cultural Revolution, when it was distributed in thousands of copies as a symbol of China's own independent vision for socialism.

Even after the GLF as an economic policy was retracted, its political consequences, which empowered local cadres and workers vis-a-vis SOE cadres and engineers, persisted to some extent. Mass mobilisation became more frequent and regular. The control of SOEs was decentralised and local CCP committees asserted more power over these enterprises than in the period prior to the GLF. Anti-technocratic ideology still possessed legitimacy. The tension between local cadres and SOE managers also continued. Some cadres looked at technicians with suspicion, thinking they might have political problems, which worsened the morale of the technicians. As one Angang engineer reportedly said in 1964: '[W]hile in primary school, I was a flower of the motherland. While in high school, I was the future of the motherland. After graduating from college, I became a target of remoulding.'²⁶