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By Peter Symonds
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Chinese academic expelled for denouncing President Xi

Former Professor Cai Xia, who has made strident criticisms of Chinese President Xi Jinping, was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on Monday for statements that “damaged the country’s reputation” and were full of “serious political problems.” Media reports indicate that she is no longer in China.

Her comments and the official reaction are symptoms of sharp divisions within the CCP regime that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuing economic slowdown as well as the Trump administration’s escalating confrontation with China.

Cai had been a professor at the CCP’s elite Central Party School since 1992, a training ground for top officials, and was thus a prominent party member. In an audio recording leaked online in June, she not only slammed Xi for his autocratic methods of rule but called for further pro-market reforms and a thorough revision of the party’s ideology.

Cai’s criticisms have been featured prominently in the Western media as she is very clearly identified with CCP factions that have been critical of Xi for embroiling China in a trade war and arms race with the US. They pin their hopes on appeasing Washington by further opening up the Chinese economy to foreign investment and bowing to US demands for economic and diplomatic subservience.

In her audio recording, Cai is critical of the processes of market reform—that is, capitalist restoration—for not going far enough. She refers in particular to the distortions of the factor market—the lack of a genuine market in land and energy, the preferential financial

treatment for state-owned enterprises and limitations on the movement of cheap rural labour into the cities.

The wholesale opening up of these areas to private, including foreign, investment would inevitably further impact on the social position of the working class. The cutting off of investment funds to so-called “zombie companies,” for instance, would lead to a further massive loss of jobs.

At the same time, Cai calls for the junking of the threadbare pretense that the CCP has anything to do with socialism and advocates the abandonment of “the theories of the so-called New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” She derides the claim that China remains socialist as “nonsense” that “does not even make sense” and has “let Chinese people become the laughing stock of the world.”

Cai’s remarks are not made from the standpoint of advocating socialism, but of bringing the CCP’s ideology into line with the policies of capitalist restoration it has implemented for decades. Indeed, she identifies with the layers of officials that have been trained and have presided over the “opening up” policies of the “reform era” of Deng Xiaoping.

Cai reserves her most trenchant criticism for President Xi, in particular for ramming through constitutional changes at the 2018 CCP National Congress which allow him to stay in office indefinitely. She declared that Xi, through his crackdown on any, even mild criticism of his policies, had turned party members into “political zombies” and accused him of “killing” the party and the country. “He has become a total mafia boss who can punish his underlings however he wants,” she said.

In calling for “democratic reform,” Cai explicitly rules out the need for “revolution” and in doing so declares her hostility to any movement of the working class and oppressed masses. Rather, her orientation is to party leaders such as Premier Li Keqiang, whose orientation was to the further market “reforms” advocated by the World Bank, and to wealthy private entrepreneurs, who, she laments, are fleeing with their funds out of China. Cai’s naked hostility to Xi and her decision to express herself now reflects the divisions that have opened up within the CCP this year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In an interview with the *Guardian*, she claimed that “within the CCP, 70 percent and among middle- and high-level officials the proportion may be even higher” sympathise with the need for reform. Cai was openly critical of Xi for not informing the Chinese public of the danger of the coronavirus earlier in January.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in 2018, Xi's consolidation of power and his removal of any limit on presidential terms was not a sign of strength but reflected the fragile and fractured character of the party, which has no progressive answer to the developing social and economic crisis or to Washington's war drive. Other factions of the CCP based on the military and police-state apparatus, and on state-owned enterprises have advocated a more strident nationalism, the building up of Chinese corporate "winners" and a more aggressive response to the US.

The promotion of Xi as the unchallengeable "core" of the party represented the resort to a Bonapartist figure who could manipulate and balance between the rival factions within the party, and suppress the mounting hostility and opposition emerging among broader masses of working people to glaring social inequality, rampant corruption and profiteering, and deteriorating living standards.

The CCP has relied for decades on police-state measures against the working class. In particular, the consolidation of Deng's market reforms, hailed by Cai, was based on the crushing by the military of working class opposition that erupted in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests against rampant inflation and extensive job losses.

The emergence of open critics of Xi points to a deep-seated crisis within the ruling party, but this is just the reflection of far broader social tensions. The Chinese economy, which had already slowed to 6 percent last year, plunged to negative 6.8 percent in the first quarter of this year before recovering to 3.2 percent in the second. Premier Li acknowledged in June that China's grossly understated jobless rate had hit 6 percent in April and that "employment is the biggest concern in people's lives." Pay cuts, layoffs and non-payment of wages continue to fuel social tensions.

The conclusion that needs to be drawn is not that capitalist restoration needs to be deepened or that figures like Cai represent a progressive alternative to Xi. What is required is the building of a party in the working class based on the political lessons of the protracted struggle of the Trotskyist movement, embodied today in the International Committee of the Fourth International, against Stalinism and Maoism which are responsible for the present crisis.

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