

## A Look at the Million Signature Drive: Can the "Mass Movement" Save Jiang Zemin?

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After 18 months of ruthlessly persecuting Falun Gong without accomplishing his goals, along comes Jiang Zemin and his million signature drive, as if this dictator suddenly gained some popularity overnight. I do not know how many signatures Jiang has been able to collect (let's not be concerned just now with how those signatures were collected.) Let's just say that they managed to get several million, or roughly a few thousandths of the 1.2 billion people in China. Whether or not this tiny fraction qualifies the petition to represent the will of the Chinese people, we will leave to the readers' judgment. However, for those who have lived through the Cultural Revolution or some other major political upheaval in our recent history, it is obvious that Jiang's strategy is nothing more than another "class struggle" scam resurrected from the junk heap of history--a history long since cast aside by the Chinese people.

Everyone familiar with modern history knows that these mass movements have been more or less unique to modern China, and that they are simply weapons used by dictators to exploit the masses to fight against the masses for the benefit of the dictatorship. In the Cultural Revolution, this weapon was used to its full capacity. Throughout modern Chinese history, every time a dictator used this weapon, it was always to serve some ulterior motive, something that could not be achieved through normal legal channels or institutional procedures. For these movements to have any chance of succeeding, two conditions must be met: 1) the dictator must have unassailable power, and 2) he must be able to single-handedly control the propaganda.

The most typical example of this phenomenon is the Cultural Revolution. In order to protect and consolidate his own power and status, some leaders including Mao needed to eliminate reformers like Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. Since he could not achieve this goal through normal legal channel or institutional procedures, he initiated the mass movement. First, with the media fully controlled, rumors were spread through newspapers, radio stations, and TV broadcasts that demonized the targets, and then hatred was stirred up among the ignorant masses and young students towards senior officials like Liu and Deng. Then, these people were encouraged to persecute the senior officials. In this way, the dictator could destroy his enemies using other people's hands.

Coming back to the present; what is the difference between Jiang's million-signature drive and the mass movement of the Cultural Revolution? After eighteen months, the brutal persecution [*against Falun Gong*] was running out of steam due to lack of support from the majority of central government leaders, and also due to the lack of a legitimate legal foundation. Faced with this dilemma, Jiang found a weapon in the trash heap of the "class struggle." First he orchestrated the self-immolation incident, and then he created a mountain of propaganda depicting Falun Gong practitioners as a bunch of people who only wanted to commit suicide in order to reach consummation. In doing this, he was able to stir up criticism and resentment toward Falun Gong among those people who do

not yet know the truth. Immediately following this assault, he encouraged people to sign their names, and even to attack Falun Gong practitioners and their families, hoping to legitimize the persecution through popular support. Jiang must have found it disappointing though, because after all, times have changed, and everyday people now are much more open-minded and aware than the people of the Cultural Revolution era. That's why Jiang's signature drive required pressure from supervisors and monitoring by police, or had to resort to material interests as a lure. The level of enthusiasm people show today cannot be compared to the fanaticism of the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution.

However, these mass movements always started with an aggressive, all-out effort, and then gradually fizzled out, like a "tiger's head with a snake's tail" [*note: meaning all bark and no bite*]. Why? The reason is very simple: as I just mentioned above, all mass movements start with rumors to stir up the demonic side of people, which leads them to over zealous actions. So when the rumors turn out to be lies, or when the zeal fades, there remains no driving force to sustain the movement. During the Cultural Revolution, the earth-shaking Red Guards only lasted for less than a year; afterwards, they had to be replaced by the workers movement, and then the army was involved. But none of them could last long. These mass movements have brought tremendous harm to society and individuals, and have left huge problems in their wake, but they never accomplished the dictators' purpose. At best, they could be compared to drinking poison to quench one's thirst--temporarily effective, but in the long run, suicidal. I think people today will not forget the lessons they learned from the Cultural Revolution and other similar mass movements.

What is ridiculous is that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Jiang Zemin still hopes to use the "mass movement" strategy as his last resort. Nothing betrays that he has reached a dead end more than this. Can this last, desperate gamble really save his life? Let us wait and see.

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