Communism in Crisis - China

Struggle for Power following the Death of Mao Zedong

The Gang of Four:
- Four leftist members of the Politburo who had been the most enthusiastic supporters of the Cultural Revolution and tolerated no criticism of Maoism whatsoever
- The Gang of Four consisted of:
  o Jiang Qing: Mao’s third and last wife
  o Zhang Chuanqiao: Vice-Premier Minister of the State Council
  o Wang Hongwen: Vice-Chairman of the CCP
  o Yao Wenyuan: Secretary of the CCP in Shanghai
- Passionate believers in Maoist ideology

Cultural Revolution:
- In 1966, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution
- Its aim was to ‘root out and right-wing Capitalist who infiltrated the party’
- During the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four represented the leftist political faction within the CCP
- They essentially became the central mobilizing force at the National level

Mao’s Death:
- 9th of December 1976
- Immediately following his death a power struggle occurred between the ‘leftists’ Gang of Four and the ‘rightists’ alliance led by Deng Xiaoping and Marshall Ye Jianqiang
- The nominal head of the country at the time was Hua Guofeng
- Hua was clearly faithful to Mao but it was unseen as to whether or not he would support the ‘leftist’ or the ‘rightist’.
- Both sides attempted to convince or even coerce Hua to surrender power to them
- Deng, hopeful of a future leadership position, became increasingly the focus of the Gang’s criticism
- The Gang of Four were particularly aggressive
  o They had control over the State’s media and continued to denounce Deng and his ‘rightist’ allies
- Jiang was influential enough to persuade Mao to secure a temporary downfall of Deng through accusing him of being part of a conspiracy that had caused the demonstrations after Zhou’s death
  o In April 1976, the Politburo officially dismissed him as Vice-President and as Vice-Chairman of the CCP
  o Mao said ‘leave him his party card to show his descendants’
- The Gang of Four began to push strongly for Wong Hongwen to succeed Mao
- Instead of accepting this, Mao promoted Hua Guofeng and named him Premier
- After three weeks of struggle, Hua finally leaned towards the ‘rightist’ side
- He consented to Marshall Ye’s suggestion to arrest the Gang of Four
- They devised a plan to kidnap the Gang of Four members
China under Deng Xiaoping - Political Party

Political Aims/Failures

- Deng’s political reforms were based on his ‘four cardinal principles’
- His aims included:
  - Keeping to the socialist road
  - Upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship
  - Upholding leadership by the Communist Party
  - Upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought
- Deng’s political aims for China included:
  - China needed internal stability in order to modernise
  - Felt that China should move away from debate and discussion, and devote itself to the task of making itself a powerful economic nation
  - 1980 resolution of the National People’s Congress condemned the liberal view that people should ‘have the right to speak out freely, air their views fully, and hold great debates’
  - Deng felt that China couldn’t afford to indulge in western democracy
  - Wanted to streamline the bureaucracy by cutting superfluous personnel/ministries
  - Wanted a style of government similar to Stalin
  - Wanted Capitalist economy, Communist government
- Deng’s political policies:
  - Vice-Premiers cut from 13 to 2, ministries under State Council cut from 92 to 52, staff from 49,000 to 32,000
  - Lower levels, corruption was weeded out. 3.33 million officials out of 20 million were rotated away from their jobs for ‘rectification, reform and retraining’
  - Eliminated those found guilty of corruption
  - Rejected democracy, Deng saw it as impractical, the peoples’ education was too low
  - Removed ultra-leftists that entered during the Cultural Revolution
- In the early 1980’s, most portraits of Mao in public places were taken down
- To prevent the concentration of power in one person or a small group of leaders, government and party leaders were given fixed terms in office
  - This was opposed to life tenure, the Party General Secretary and the Premier were now limited to serving a maximum of two five-year terms
  - In the early 1980’s, new constitutions for party and state were introduced, in order to separate their functions
  - However these had a limited impact, and in October 1987 Zhao Ziyang called for the separation of party and state, stating that the party should determine national aims and priorities
  - While the government should formulate and execute policies, this did not lead to a reduction in the party’s central control of political life
  - National People’s Congress was set up in 1954 as the highest legislative body in the People’s Republic, had its power increased
  - While previously it had only approved the decisions of the party leadership, it could not modify draft legislation
  - On occasion, it amended draft laws presented by party leaders, and in the 1990’s showed a willingness to be more critical of government measures
    - One third of NPC delegates either voted against or abstained on the issue of the Three Gorges Dam project