

“But I want to be one. That’s why I came.”

And many more came. Hundreds. Thousands. Hundred thousands. Each one had a story to tell. Telling stories made them feel better. And feeling better made them free.

But freedom needed to be guarded. Anywhere. Anytime. If it was a most ordinary spring. If it was an early summer. In spring, rain never failed to come. In summer, thunderstorms. Indeed, they came again this year.

Lightning struck and burned the kites. Burning kites were always horrible to look at. They looked like tanks crushing at one another. They did not make one free.

Rain drenched the sidewalks, the avenue and the square. People scampered for shelter, trampling on the mats and beds. Trampled beds were often a terrible sight. They looked like corpses in an overstocked morgue. They did not make people free.

And people who were not free often imagined more horrifying, terrifying things. Like there was a carnage at Tiananmen. The fact was that between 3:30 and 5:00 a.m. of June 4, when the people’s army came to clear the square, there was no living soul in sight in its 40-hectare expanse. How could the army kill non-living souls? No one, but no one, was there anymore to kill. What they saw were only carcasses of kites. What they heard were only the moans of storytellers. It was a time of peace.

Indeed it was a heavenly dawn that greeted everyone.

Waking up from this nightmare of peace, I returned to the real month of June.

SOME QUESTIONS, SOME ANSWERS, ABOUT THE CHINESE STRUGGLE

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(The following questions are the ones most commonly asked about the events in China. The publishers of *Echoes from Tiananmen*, who call themselves Friends of Chinese Minzhu, posed these questions to two activists of the democracy movement who choose to remain anonymous for obvious reasons — Ed.)

You say that you oppose the present regime in China, but does the democracy movement have a clear or unified picture of what form of government to put in its place which would be able to run such a huge country?

The question implies that the present structure of government in China is a somehow perfect, static formula which cannot be improved. It also suggests that the democracy movement wished to sweep away the old systems entirely and start building new political models from scratch.

Neither assumption is true.

A leadership which massacres unarmed, popular demonstrators who are voicing legitimate grievances and calling for peaceful change is not fit to rule any country. It is therefore legitimate to oppose such a leadership and to demand the removal and trial of those who committed crimes against the people, and to call for effective changes in the system of government that would prevent such a massacre from taking place ever again.

But it is not true that the demonstrators did not have concrete and

clear demands, and that those pledged to carry on the fight do not have a coherent and legitimate program of reform.

As early as April 28th, the student demonstrators had spelled out the following clear demands:

- To reaffirm the political achievements of Hu Yaobang, to reaffirm the merits of democracy and liberty.
- To repudiate the “anti-bourgeois liberalism” and the “anti-spiritual pollution” campaigns.
- To release details of the financial situations of all high cadres and their families.
- To grant freedom of the press and the right of all people to publish newspapers.
- To increase the fund for education and to improve the rewards to intellectuals.
- To remove the restrictions on rallies and demonstrations.
- To accurately report on the student movement.

As well as this, they made various demands as events and their campaign unfolded, such as the call for freedom to form independent unions, dialogue with government leaders, and the call for the withdrawal of hostile editorials accusing them of criminal acts.

The demonstrators believe that many of the most serious problems present in Chinese society result from a lack of popular participation in policy-making, and a lack (of checks and balances) in the political structure. Their core demands would therefore lay the groundwork for an important process of reform to solve these problems. The question of whether this could or should happen simply within the Party, alongside the Party, or in a new political structure is complex. Since the massacre many people have altered their opinion on the party's capacity for genuine reform, but the first demands are for measures that would enable much greater people's participation in the discussion, formulation, and assessment of these very issues. The original demands of the demonstrators point the direction for political reform in China. The extent and shape of that reform is a process, which the democracy movement believes must involve the participation of the people themselves.

If wise political reforms are not introduced soon, there is a great

chance that China will have to face ungovernable chaos, or miserable, deprived repression, or both.

Isn't it true that the CPC has succeeded in feeding, housing, educating and providing medical care for all the people in the largest and one of the poorest nations on earth. Don't these gains outweigh any mistakes made by the leadership and justify its retention of power by all means?

This question assumes both that the demonstrators were an absolute threat to the economy, law and order and the rule of government, and that, if they were, the threat could not have been removed without a massacre. Both are, of course, false assumptions.

Furthermore, it is simplistic and perhaps utopian to say that the CPC has achieved such tremendous improvement in the lives of all the Chinese people that today's leaders have the right to use any means necessary to remove perceived threats to their power.

Since the CPC achieved victory in 1949, there have been successes and failures. Many of the most important economic gains were achieved in the first few years of the revolution through land reform. People in and around large cities experienced the most improvement in their livelihoods.

The Chinese achievement of improving the basic living standards was impressive given the size of the country. While there has been greater material development in some other Third World areas in the last forty years, it occurred in smaller nations such as north and south Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia.

But despite advances, there have been also periodic famines in China since 1949 up to the present, and massive numbers of death and huge economic setbacks were caused during the Cultural Revolution. The image of China as a nation that has brought an acceptable basic living standard, and a secure life to all its people is an incomplete one, built on carefully prepared propaganda, often accepted far too uncritically by overseas intellectuals.

Earlier exaggerated claims of gains have since been discounted by the CPC itself. China is still a very poor nation with some areas of desperate poverty, illiteracy and disease. The government admits that a significant percentage of the population remains below the official poverty line.

China's progress has been impressive when compared to pre-revolutionary China. But that was forty years ago. Many other nations have also re-constructed in this time. Most of China's citizens were born since the revolution, and the "bad old days" before the revolution appear as a distant era to them, mythologized by the party. Development cannot be measured in a static way against a forty-year old yardstick. The Chinese people do not want to assess their situation against the first half of the century, nor, for that matter, against other Third World nations; they aspire for continued progress. The CPC cannot forever cite early achievements to justify its use of any means necessary to silence critics.

As the student demonstrators defied the party leadership, aren't they accurately described as counter-revolutionaries? Were they not part of an overseas conspiracy to cause trouble for the Chinese government?

Until a few days before the massacre, Chinese leaders themselves were calling the demonstrators "patriotic" and their demands legitimate. Only when the CPC leadership were preparing the brutal crackdown in the first few days of June were the demonstrators labeled counter-revolutionary. Even after the massacre, the leaders did not claim that they were organized from outside, simply that "outside elements [including Chinese people from Hongkong, which Beijing considers to be Chinese citizens] created the conditions for the chaos". Only later have some senior leaders and overseas apologists for the Beijing regime claimed that the actual movement was an "outside conspiracy" or that the early movement was penetrated and manipulated by an outside conspiracy.

There is an important difference between opposing the present leadership of the Party, and opposing the Party itself. Many members of the Chinese Communist Party, within China, supported the democracy movement, support socialism and now oppose the Li-Yang-Deng (Li Peng, Yang Shangkun, Deng Xiaoping — ed.) clique. Some believe that with the correct leadership, the party is capable of reform from within, others believe there must be independent, external mechanisms to check party power, and others feel that the introduction of a plural political system is the only guarantee against abuse of power. These debates existed within China, these debates were met with

arrests, solitary confinement and ultimately by tanks, machine guns and executions. Yet the movement working to revitalize these debates survives, and must be supported if China is to move forward.

Does the democracy movement support Zhao Ziyang, or do they perhaps look back to the leadership of Mao or Zhou Enlai for inspiration?

One of the great advances of the 1989 democracy movement over earlier Chinese reform movements is that most of its core members do not see their future lying with one particular individual emerging as a wise leader. Most do not put all their hope in the arrival of a "benevolent dictator" as people did in the time of the emperors. This feudal attitude towards leaders has permeated Chinese history and was not really eradicated when the Communist Party took power in 1949, and was even exploited by the CPC at some stages.

Does the democracy movement really have mass support in the cities? And what do the Chinese peasants, who after all represent 80% of the Chinese people, think about the government?

Those people who dared to be seen marching in the streets felt so strongly about the need for change that they risked almost everything to express their feelings. After Martial Law was declared, the hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions, out on the streets in Beijing were marching illegally. At one point, more than one seventh of the entire city's population marched. They marched under foreign-supplied surveillance cameras in position at every intersection. They risked identification by the Public Security Bureau, they risked being reported by the street committees that monitor the activities of all residents, and they risked being reported by their work units, which control all the working and social life of all people. If you lose your job in China, you lose your home, you lose all welfare benefits, food allowances, school places for your children. Yet still the millions dared to march, and yet hundreds of thousands marched and demonstrated in all other major cities in China. For everyone who marched, how many also shared their frustration but remained too frightened to go onto the streets? That so many people took the unprecedented step of appearing at an unofficial

demonstration is an indication of the massive support for the demonstrator's demands for reforms.

In the countryside the situation is extremely hard to assess. If the average Chinese city-dweller lacks information about the rest of the world, the Chinese peasants lack information about the events in Chinese cities.

There are stories that in some distant parts of China there are Communist Party officials who have never heard of Deng Xiaoping, such is the problem of communication. The government organized demonstrations of peasants against the democracy movement in early June, but people said they were ordered into the cities, paid to attend, and had no idea what the issue was.

There are widespread reports of resentment and unhappiness within the rural population. These come from the impact of economic reforms rather than any desire for political change.

The reform of land ownership to a leasing system has given peasants more control over their own lives. However, corruption of grants, subsidies, tax and pricing system affects the peasants as much, if not more than the workers. The relaxation of price subsidies and crop planning has enabled some well-positioned peasants to grow rich, but a greater number have fallen victim to the resultant inflation and the unpredictability of the market system in agriculture. The publicity given to the few peasants who have grown rich has created a chasm between the official image of the situation in the countryside, to which all peasants are supposed to aspire, and the reality of their situation and its likelihood of improvement. Such frustration did not exist in earlier times, when the propaganda said that to be poor would be politically correct and noble. There are reports that due to more widespread economic management problems in China, the government have for the past two years paid some peasants for their grain in scrip [i.e., I.O.U] notes rather than cash.

Are not many right-wing and pro-capitalist groups using the democracy movement in China to argue that communism has failed, communism is in crisis throughout the world or that communism always leads to brutality by the State? Shouldn't the left therefore defend the Communist Party of China?

It is to be expected that right-wing, anti-socialist groups and governments will try to take advantage of these tragic events in China. This is why it is even more important for socialists everywhere to make their support of the people's movement in China loud and clear. Many socialists around the world moved quickly to develop a clear understanding and explanation of the events in China, and have pointed out the nature of the democracy movement as a genuine mass movement voicing legitimate demands. People should extend their support and friendship to the Chinese students and intellectuals outside China who are determined to continue the movement, and who need help. The Chinese people will one day win this struggle. If the left abandons them in their time of greatest need, they abandon them to the right-wingers. The reaction of the right-wing governments and groups to events in China is, historically speaking, only secondary. The primary issue is the democracy movement and its suppression by the CPC. At such a time, socialists must base their responses on these events. Some dogmatic sections of the left have issued statements in support of the Chinese leadership's violent crackdown on the demonstrators. These statements appear to be a response to the actions of other enemies: Western imperialist governments and the Western pro-capitalist media. They accuse the West of using the issue for their own political purposes. However, by basing their arguments on Western reactions rather than the primary event, are they not also using the tragic suffering of the Chinese people to fight their own separate battles? By applying the simplistic rule [maxim] that "my enemy's enemies are my friends", they are betraying the Chinese martyrs and endangering their own cause.

If the CPC has given the anti-socialist forces great opportunities for criticisms of socialism and communism, this is but another function of the errors committed by the CPC.

The capitalist governments and multi-national corporations are chiefly motivated by opportunities to do business and to make profits. Experience elsewhere in the Third World has taught them that they can achieve this regardless of human rights records of any country. Foreign capitalists are eager to utilize China's cheap, controlled workers, and to sell to the nation's vast market. Their memory of the Tiananmen massacre will therefore be very short. People must be there to support the Chinese people's movement as they come to learn who their true allies are.

Demonstrators in Tiananmen Square were singing the Internationale. At the same time, they erected a statue of liberty. Are they socialists, or are they influenced and inspired by the western capitalist ideal, foolishly believing that the American model of liberal democracy is the best for China?

The students and workers of China have grown up with an understanding of the benefits of a society which provides security for all and which cares for the young, the old and the sick. Socialism is their context; they know the strengths and benefits of collective organization.

At the same time, though, many people in China are dissatisfied with their standard of living and the level of their personal freedom. The enforced diet of political study sessions, slogans and mass campaigns of the past four decades, often very contradictory as the Party reversed its positions, has left most Chinese deeply cynical about abstract political theories, ideals and promises of a perfect society. Workers and peasants judge leaders and political systems by measurable results, particularly those affecting their own livelihoods. They have seen a real drop in spending power in the last few years. They now know enough about life in places like Europe and Japan to know that things in China could be much better. It is therefore undeniable that many ordinary people in China are disillusioned and dissatisfied with what the Chinese government has done in the name of socialism, and they have a growing interest in alternative systems.

But anyway, say, for example, that the demonstrators were singing a western pop song rather than the Internationale. To what extent would this actually diminish the accuracy of their criticisms of Chinese society and the justice of their cause. It is crucial to understand the isolation of the Chinese people, and their lack of balanced information on the situation in the outside world. They are unable to gain sufficient information and critiques of Western development models and societies. For decades the CPC has fed the people with a very black and white picture of the rest of the world, criticizing the West for decades, then praising it as a target to be "caught up with" by the next century. If the Chinese people hold some simplistic views of the world it is the fault of the leadership. The problem would be eased if the demonstrators' demands for freer press and debate were allowed.

The Burmese students and demonstrators were massacred in their hundreds, and again are now facing brutal suppression from the military regime in that country. Some demonstrators carried posters saying "down with socialism". Does this devalue the justice or truth of their cause? In their context, they oppose the government which oppresses them, and which calls itself socialist. Yet they are a popular movement opposing a brutal regime (away from the Western media cameras). Will socialists around the world turn their back on the students because of the terminology they use in the Burmese context?

Socialists concerned about China should not wait around looking for reassuring signs and symbols of "political correctness" within the Chinese democracy movement (singing the Internationale, quoting Marx, etc.) They should assess the legitimacy of the issues the movement is raising, they should examine the level of mass support the movement enjoys, and they should assess the implications of the government's reaction. It is on this basis that they should decide their support of the movement, and the way in which they will build contact with it, and engage it in debate.

The "Statue of Liberty" referred to by most of the demonstrators as the "Goddess of Democracy" actually more closely resembles the "White-haired Girl" from the cultural revolution opera. However, any symbolism used by the people's democracy movement in China must once again be considered fully in the Chinese social context. If America meant anything to the demonstrators, it was merely an abstract symbol of change rather than a concrete economic and political model to be followed.

Aren't the demands of the students Western-influenced bourgeois liberal ideas, such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly? Such a vast and poor country as China cannot afford these luxuries. Such individual freedoms would create chaos.

Economic and political reforms are needed to prevent chaos in China. The economy is going badly because the political structure does not enable [the checks and balances] to ensure that reforms do not cause hardships and problems for certain groups. More channels for people's participation in the Chinese government are the only means

by which China can move forward as a nation, and the only way by which it can do this effectively, smoothly and without chaos.

Although Western societies may be labelled bourgeois democracies, universal suffrage, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of association were originally freedoms enjoyed only by the bourgeoisie.

The working class fought for the universal application of these rights, in the same way as they fought to establish the trade union movement. Many good people died during these struggles. It is therefore wrong to label these rights "bourgeois freedoms". What sort of "road to socialism" can be followed if the people are not free to hear contending views, to hold meetings, and to organize? Such rights are not luxuries, but the essential building blocks of socialism.

The justification for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat has always been that this state would be a transitional stage to give the people time to eliminate the residual power of the bourgeoisie, to build their own institutions, and to gain real control of the means of production; after which the state would gradually crumble away. How can the workers and peasants possibly achieve these goals if the party restricts their access to information, their freedom to hold meetings, and their rights to organize?

The situation in the West can be just as oppressive as that in China. If tens of thousands of students in Britain sat in the center of London and demanded a direct dialogue with Margaret Thatcher, or her resignation, wouldn't they, too, be forcibly dispersed?

In the West, and in many Third World countries, calls for resignation of political leaders ring out in the press and media daily. There are countless demonstrations filled with banners and chants against the leadership. The leaders face regular debate with political opposition in parliament, and with hostile journalists in the media. This situation is true even in countries like India and the Philippines.

Who believes that the governments in the West, or even most of the Third World, would disperse peaceful demonstrations with tanks and machine guns without ever resorting to teargas and clubs? The left in Western nations should not resort to childish fantasy that they "face similar oppression". They deny the gains won by generations of

courageous workers.

The level of persecution in China is so very very different. We have no real opposition, there are no forums for debate, and there is only the official, highly-controlled press. The call by the demonstrators for a "face-to-face dialogue" with the high-level leaders must be seen in this context. The call for face-to-face meetings was a desperate act resorted to by ordinary people who had absolutely no other recognized channels through which to express their deeply-held feelings and frustrations about the problems of Chinese society.

In the Chinese cultural context, the call for a meeting was a call for the leadership to make a single, symbolic gesture signalling their acknowledgment that the demonstrators had legitimate demands, and to accept that they had the right to peacefully express these demands.

Isn't democracy an illusion in many parts of the Third World? Isn't it a bourgeois trick which leads to exploitation and confusion? Look at India.

Democracy is not perfect, but it is an important element, but only one element, in guaranteeing popular participation and control of the political process. Other mechanisms include workplace democracy, independent mass organizations and trade unions, guarantees on freedom of information, and an independent legal system. Democracy is shaped and affected by the socio-economic context in which it is implemented. The difference between bourgeois democracy and people's democracy is a very real one. If democratic reforms were introduced into China by a communist party intent on meaningful reform, one would expect these would take the form of people's democracy.