

# From the Archives Protesters Defy China Deadline

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**B**EIJING -- Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in Tian An Men Square on Sunday night and early this morning in a pro-democracy protest timed to coincide with today's arrival of Soviet President [Mikhail S. Gorbachev](#).

About 30,000 student protesters, citizen supporters and onlookers remained in the square at 9 a.m. this morning, half an hour after a deadline issued Sunday by Beijing authorities for the square to be cleared.

Shortly before the deadline, a loudspeaker truck stood at the north end of the square rebroadcasting the warning, but police had not yet made any attempt to clear the square or block entry to it.

## Formal Welcome Due

Chinese President Yang Shangkun is scheduled to formally welcome Gorbachev in an outdoor ceremony in front of the Great Hall of the People, facing the square, at 4 p.m. this afternoon.

But the overnight vigil by protesters left the government facing a variety of unpleasant options: carrying out the ceremony with protesters in the square, moving the ceremony inside the Great Hall, holding the ceremony at another location or trying to clear the square before 4 p.m. by use of police or by making concessions to the students.

The students, gathered beneath flagpoles on which they had raised red school flags and a black banner proclaiming "Hunger Strike," were demanding a formal dialogue between protest representatives and the government on ways to promote democratic reforms.

At the center of the protest were about 1,500 students on a hunger strike, most of whom began their strike and sit-down demonstration Saturday afternoon.

"Economic reforms cannot succeed without political reform," said a student hunger striker named Zhao. "So we want to push political reform forward, and make our system more democratic."

## Key Demands Listed

Key student demands in a wave of protests that began in mid-April are press freedom, better pay and living conditions for intellectuals, and an attack on official corruption.

Shortly before dawn this morning, in what was intended as a conciliatory gesture, more than 1,000 of the hunger strikers moved from the middle to the side of the square, away from the Great Hall of the People. Leaders said the intent was to be able to remain in the square while allowing the government some sense of security in carrying out the welcoming ceremony for Gorbachev.

"If we can move over, the whole world will support us," Wuer Kaixi, one of the leaders of the student movement, told the crowd in urging the move. "This isn't retreating. It's just moving."

About 200 of the hunger strikers, however, disagreed with the decision to move and remained near the middle of the square.

The hunger strikers were surrounded by more than 10,000 student supporters.

"The Soviet Union Has Gorbachev. Who Does China Have?" declared one banner, implying praise for the Soviet president's political and social reforms and criticism of the Chinese leadership.

"You're 58 and I'm 85 !?!" read another banner, contrasting the youthful Gorbachev with China's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, who will be 85 in August.

### Dialogue With Protesters

The government, in an attempt Sunday to defuse the confrontation, sent several high officials including Li Tieying, head of the State Education Commission, to meet with representatives of the protesters. Negotiations on a possible compromise, which presumably would have to involve some sort of formal public dialogue with the students, broke down after nearly three hours without any agreement.

Ordinary Chinese citizens heavily outnumbered students in the square Sunday evening, when a total of about 50,000 people gathered until past midnight. While generally unorganized, these primarily youthful factory and office workers were so clearly supportive of the protest that most could be considered demonstrators rather than onlookers.

Around midnight, groups of non-students began marching around the square in support demonstrations.

"The citizens have joined in! Long live the students!" chanted one group of about 800 Beijing residents who marched through the streets surrounding the square.

"We support them," explained a young worker in the crowd. "They're saying what's in our hearts. When they give speeches, they speak very well."

### 'We Understand Them'

A middle-aged cadre wearing a high-buttoned blue "Mao jacket" was asked whether he too supported the students. He hesitated--apparently conscious of plainclothes police and informers throughout the crowd--and then said, "We understand them."

Mustering his bravery, he added with a smile: "Long live understanding!"

Another man, who identified himself as a former Red Guard, the Maoist brigades during the Cultural Revolution, from Beijing who was sent to the countryside in Inner Mongolia during that 10-year period of upheaval, also praised the students.

"This society is too corrupt," he said. "By rising up, the students can push forward an anti-corruption movement. Officials are using their power to steal things. Even ordinary people steal from their workplaces whenever they get a chance. The only patriots now are the students."

### Hopes for Fewer Controls

This man also said that while he can visit Beijing, he has never been able to get permission to move back with his family. He said he hopes that the protests will bring about a lessening of political and social controls, and thus enable him and others like him to return permanently to their places of birth.

Some students had expected the police to move in to clear the square before today's 8:30 a.m. deadline, while others felt that the government had no choice but to exercise restraint. In either case, most believed that by timing their protest to overlap with Gorbachev's visit, they were placing extraordinary pressure on the government.

"The government won't let the world see so many students demonstrating here," predicted one student Sunday evening. "I think maybe the police will move in."

"I think maybe the government will make some concessions," countered a woman student. "The pressure on them is much greater than the pressure on us."

If the government were to call in police or soldiers to clear the square, they would probably touch off massive student street demonstrations today, this woman said.

### Chaos Called Possible

Another protester, a young man named Chen, said the result of such action would be even more serious.

"If they use force against us, maybe there will be chaos," he said.

Students view the crowds of supportive citizens as essential to their defense.

"Oppose (police) violence! The people are our protection!" declared one student banner.

Student leaders also announced that support protests are being organized for today. About 1,000 primarily youthful professors and instructors from Beijing University pledged to boycott teaching today in support of the students, and a group including famous writers and other intellectuals was also planning to demonstrate, according to announcements made by student organizers in the square Sunday evening.

## Little Fear of Backlash

Protesters seem to have little fear of provoking a backlash by orthodox hard-liners that might set back political reform and lead to tighter controls, as happened for a few months after smaller student protests in the winter of 1986-1987.

"There's a big difference from two years ago," said a student named Hao, referring to the protests. "Ordinary citizens are supporting us, and even our teachers are supporting us."

Some students stressed that they are not absolutely opposed to the government and are not seeking a violent confrontation. They said they simply want to pressure the Chinese leaders to carry out necessary reforms more effectively.

"We still have faith in our government," one hunger striker.

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