

From the Archives Students Defy Regime With March in Beijing

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BEIJING -- Tens of thousands of students took to the streets of the capital today, defying martial law with a boisterous call for democracy and demanding that Premier **Li Peng** resign, just as he and other hard-line **Communist Party** leaders were mounting a chilling ideological crackdown.

"End martial law, demand human rights!" and "Li Peng, step down!" read large red banners hoisted by the marchers, who snaked through the city along several routes.

At one point, the protesters passed Tian An Men Square, the ceremonial center of the nation. The square has been occupied for the past 15 days by thousands of students who dug in after staging a one-week hunger strike and have so far resisted rising government pressure to disperse.

Cheered by Onlookers

Far fewer ordinary citizens joined the students than in several massive demonstrations over the past two weeks, but those who lined the route cheered and flashed victory signs. Passengers stranded on buses that were trapped by the rally at a major intersection leaned out their windows and clapped in approval.

"This is what is in the people's hearts," said a man in his mid-30s who smoked a cigarette as he watched from a curb.

One group of students carried brooms and a banner saying they would clean up corruption in government-- along with the garbage strewn about Tian An Men Square.

Earlier in the day, students were posing for snapshots in front of the Monument of the People's Heroes at the center of the square, as though they were preparing for the whole scene to become a memory. A cluster of protesters gathered around a poster denouncing Li Peng's wife and son for corruption. Among her alleged crimes were getting drunk one evening at the Great Wall Hotel, and having a swimming pool built.

At the same time, army troops encircled Beijing and awaited orders to belatedly enforce a May 20 martial-law decree following a major power struggle in the Chinese leadership that apparently resulted in the purge of Communist Party General Secretary **Zhao Ziyang** and others sympathetic with the pro-democracy squatters in the plaza.

Responding to a tense and increasingly hopeless situation, student leaders proposed Saturday that they withdraw from the square after making a final show of strength with major rallies today and Tuesday. It was not clear whether the students felt they had already achieved sufficient results or decided they must abandon the protest to avoid a violent confrontation with authorities.

In a conflicting strategy, however, representatives of another student faction distributed leaflets on the campus of Beijing University calling for a renewed hunger strike in front of the Great Hall of the People, on the square, and before the gates of Zhongnanhai, the exclusive residential compound of top party leaders. The leaflet also escalated demands to include revision of [China's](#) constitution.

Within One-Party System

Until now, student activists have been careful to emphasize that they want to work exclusively within the one-party Communist system while demanding free speech, an attack to official corruption and an open dialogue with the government. They were furious at being branded by an official party editorial as unpatriotic and causing turmoil.

But while Zhao advocated a conciliatory stance, Li and his backer, senior leader Deng Xiao-ping, are now pumping up the party's ideological indoctrination apparatus to suppress dissent and turn public opinion against the students, who began agitating for reform with popular support in mid-April.

A succession of influential party leaders have issued statements in support of Li's martial-law declaration in recent days, while rank-and-file cadres are reportedly being forced to attend study sessions on the need to "restore order."

In an apparent setback for those hoping that party moderates might retain some influence over the course of events, the official New China News Agency on Saturday reported the gist of a "written speech" by Wan Li, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, backing martial law.

Wan, believed to have been an ally of Zhao, cut short a visit to the United States earlier in the week to return to China, a move that dissidents hoped meant he would throw his weight behind the beleaguered party chief.

He never made it to Beijing, however. Wan got off his plane when it made an unscheduled stop in Shanghai, where he supposedly was to receive medical treatment for an undisclosed illness. The agency dispatch quoted Wan as parroting the hard-liners' accusations of treason against unnamed conspirators--presumably Zhao and those loyal to him.

"All sorts of things have indicated that a very small number of people are plotting political conspiracy," it said, "making use of students' strikes and deliberately creating turmoil, thus seriously disrupting the normal order of society."

Students, meanwhile, were growing exhausted by their marathon camp-in in Tian An Men Square, and thousands have been returning home to the provinces in recent days, ostensibly to spread the so-called

democracy movement to their hometowns. But fresh recruits continued to flow into the capital at a rate of about 16,000 a day, according to Saturday's edition of the Beijing Daily.

Huge Student Influx

The newspaper estimated that about 172,000 students have come to Beijing since May 16, when the hunger strike at the square began, while fewer than half that number have gone home, frequently forcing their way onto trains without paying.

They joined tens of thousands of Beijing students digging in at the square or staging campus strikes. The protests have so far enjoyed an extraordinary outpouring of support from ordinary citizens, attracting crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands--and by some accounts, as many as a million people.

After Li imposed martial law last Saturday, throngs of students and citizens formed barricades blocking People's Liberation Army forces from entering the city to forcibly clear the square.

By this weekend, however, it had become clear that the troop movements had as much to do with a showdown in the upper echelons of the Communist Party as with any attempt to restore order in the streets of the capital. After a period of uncertainty early in the week, Li and Deng consolidated their control over the party and the military and were preparing to purge Zhao and several of his key allies, according to diplomatic sources.

So far, indications are that the crackdown remains largely political in nature and may spare the students and their intellectual backers from retribution.

Shopping for Shirts

Indeed, one of the intellectuals rumored to be marked for arrest is Su Shaozhi, former head of the Institute for Marxism, Leninism and Mao Tse-tung Thought and a leading advocate of ideological change in China. But Saturday night, he was seen casually shopping for shirts with his wife at a free market along Beijing's leading thoroughfare, Chang An Boulevard.

"Up until now, there has been no problem for me," Su said. But, he added, "maybe later there will be a problem."

The fact that authorities have allowed the carnival of protest to continue on Tian An Men Square has perhaps given a false sense of security to some intellectuals who are likely to be victims of persecution in a crackdown, diplomats said.

"There still is a contradiction between the harsh language they (officials) are spreading and the situation on Tian An Men," said a West European diplomat. If the square is not cleared soon, "they will look silly, just the way they did after they declared martial law" and troops failed to enter central Beijing.

Losing Mandate of Heaven

"People aren't scared now," said an Asian diplomat. "They say, 'What can they do to us?' There were 2 million people in the square (last week). I think most people think the mandate of heaven has been lost. Something snapped."

But few observers doubt that Deng, 84, a proponent of economic reform but political restraint who has ruled China for more than a decade, emerged from the crisis more powerful than ever.

"The only conclusion I can draw is that it's one stubborn old man calling the shots," the Asian diplomat said. Times staff writer Jim Mann contributed to this story.

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