




## Vera Schwarcz: Seventy Years Already

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### VERA SCHWARCZ

Loudspeakers belch languid waves  
to drench students hell-bent on marching  
for "Science" and "Democracy"—as if  
Western pop music could make them forget  
Western political hopes, as if today  
was not their day in history. But these  
youths know, they greet the Party's dance tunes  
with softly hummed verses  
of the "Internationale." Over and over again:

*Qilai, qilai jihan, jiaopode nuli*  
*Arise you hungry, shackled slaves...*  
*Arise for the last fight before*  
*a bright tomorrow*

While one tall youth  
in well cut jeans, bullhorn  
in hand, pleads with passersby:  
"We're tired, so tired!  
For seventy years already students  
have marched for freedom—too long  
in coming!"

I am inside the chain of human  
hands, inside the march, circled  
by young writers who have not  
lost faith in song, the Internationale  
their bond of hope across an angry,  
sullen world. For once I worry less  
if this event is mine, or theirs,  
what counts is to take back one  
day of history from those who would  
cut out its tongue, its heart.

Originally published in Walter  
Tonetto, ed., *Earth Against  
Heaven: A Tiananmen Square  
Anthology* (Five Islands Press,  
1990). Poems revised April 1,  
2004.

In front of me, a boy bedecked  
 in a paper-bag cape decorated  
 with bold calligraphy: "Mother, don't  
 think me bad because I heard  
 my nation cry and did not  
 plug my ears."

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