

China Hears Out Students, and Lets Millions Listen

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** APRIL 30, 1989

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Television viewers were treated for nearly three hours tonight to the extraordinary sight of Government officials being interrogated by ordinary students, who raised sensitive questions about corruption, beatings, the deployment of troops and the isolation of the nation's top leaders.

In a clear sign of the influence that students have gained through their demonstrations, the Government conducted the informal talks with student leaders who had been condemned just days ago, and then broadcast the discussions on national television.

The Government's leading spokesman, Yuan Mu, also told the students that Prime Minister Li Peng thought China's student demonstrators have the same aims as the Communist Party and Government. Mr. Li's remarks appeared to be a turnabout from the Government's stern warning against the student protests. A Call to 'Meet the People'

"We called on Prime Minister Li Peng to come out," one angry student said in front of tens of millions of television viewers. "Why can't the people's Prime Minister meet the people?" The atmosphere of the meeting seemed more like that of a lively news conference than an informal talk, with frequent bitter exchanges and criticisms voiced by both sides. One student walked out of the meeting because

he did not think there was fair representation on either side.

What was remarkable was not just that the meeting took place but that the Government televised nearly all of it, apparently as a concession to a student's demand. The official New China News Agency also gave a long, relatively balanced account of the event.

The session reflected the Government's attempts to soothe university students and persuade them to return to class after two weeks of pro-democracy demonstrations. The willingness to meet with the students and televise the encounter was another sign of the Government's meekness after an enormous demonstration on Thursday that overcame lines of police and troops. The Students' Questions

The session was less notable for the officials' answers than for the questions the students raised.

"The official press says that there were no beatings of students," one student said. "But a student in our university was seriously wounded."

Came the reply: "We are investigating it and the investigation is time-consuming."

The Government officials, who included a deputy minister of education, He Dongchang, said they would suggest that students who had organized the class boycott and demonstrations not be punished. In a move to appease concerns about Government extravagance, Mr. Yuan confirmed reports that China would no longer import fancy cars and that leaders would not hold their annual summer convention at a nearby resort.

He added that he would forward a student's complaint that some leaders engaged in extravagant pastimes, like golf.

But the officials also criticized the students for Thursday's demonstrations. They said the marchers had disrupted traffic and cost the economy large sums in lost business.

Most students, while heartened by the session, seemed to regard it as inadequate. The unofficial student associations boycotted the meeting, although some members went as individuals. About one-third of the students at the talks this afternoon were members of the unofficial student union, while the rest were officers of the official pro-Government student organizations. Vow to Consider Disclosure

In another gesture to the students, the official press today reported that the

Mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong, and the city's Communist Party leader, Li Ximing, would seriously consider publicly disclosing their assets.

Disclosure of wealth is a student demand that has received a great deal of support from workers, who appear dissatisfied with what they view as rampant corruption among Government officials.

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