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UPHEAVAL IN CHINA; Dissident in the U.S. Hears of Deep Cracks in the Party

By FOX BUTTERFIELD MAY 22, 1989

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Liu Binyan, widely regarded as China's most respected writer both for his political courage and the forcefulness of his prose, has been spending the last few days in the United States in constant touch by telephone with his broad network of well-placed friends in Beijing.

From everything Mr. Liu's friends tell him, he sees deep divisions within the leadership of China's armed forces and the continued disintegration of the Communist Party over Deng Xiaoping's decision to forcibly suppress the popular demonstrations in Beijing.

In fact, according to one report Mr. Liu received, on Saturday Mr. Deng flew from the central city of Wuhan to Beijing to see the situation for himself, and then shaken by what he found, flew on to Shanghai where the local authorities refused to let him stay.

The 84-year-old Mr. Deng was then forced to fly back to Wuhan, Mr. Liu said.

The account could not be independently verified. But in China, where in times of crisis news first makes its way through an unofficial grapevine of political contacts, such stories often prove to contain at least a measure of truth. A Report of Army Resistance

Mr. Liu, a 62-year-old former journalist for the Communist Party paper, the People's Daily, said his friends had told him Mr. Deng had gone to Wuhan earlier this week after meeting Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader. There, far from the capital, he had called a meeting of the commanders of the country's eight military regions to discuss how to deal with the demonstrations. But at least three of the commanders, including the general in charge of the troops in Beijing, expressed sympathy for the student protesters, Mr. Liu said. As a sign of his support, the Beijing commander has stopped supplies of food from being delivered to troops sent to the city from other military regions, Mr. Liu said.

Mr. Liu is currently attending a conference on human rights in China at the University of Montana in Missoula. He was expelled from the Communist Party two years ago after being blamed for an earlier round of student demonstrations, but he remains a deeply revered figure to millions of Chinese, virtually a national idol, for his exposes of corruption within the party.

The underlying reason for the demonstration's success so far, said Mr. Liu, is that "the Communist Party lost all its legitimacy with the mistakes of the Cultural Revolution and then the corruption" of recent years. "The party created all this trouble for itself," said Mr. Liu, who was expelled from the Communist Party two years ago after being blamed for an earlier round of student protests. Other Areas of Dissent

In addition to the debate among the military commanders during their meeting with Mr. Deng, Mr. Liu said he had received information about several other areas of dissent within the party's leadership over the past few days. Mr. Liu cautioned that not all of these reports could be verified, but he said they indicated "what people's views are." The areas of dissent included these:

* Ten Government ministers have offered to resign, with several of the ministries, including the Foreign Ministry, proclaiming their virtual independence since Prime Minister Li Peng replaced the party General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, as China's acting leader, Mr. Liu said. Mr. Liu referred to the decision to put Mr. Li in control as a "coup."

* Since Mr. Li won a crucial vote in the Standing Committee of the Politburo over Mr. Zhao last week, only three of China's 30 provinces have expressed loyalty to him, Mr. Liu said. The other provinces are either still debating how to react or are deliberately keeping silent, he added.

* After the vote against Mr. Zhao, three of his closest aides, including Bao

Tong, the political secretary of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, published a six-point declaration challenging Mr. Li. The declaration said the student demonstrators were "patriotic and democratic," charged that the senior party leadership had long betrayed "the people's conscience," and warned that the crackdown on the students would lead to "chaos and disintegration."

The three aides also demanded an immediate meeting of the full Communist Party Congress to discuss the "coup." "The country is the people's country, the army is the people's army and the Government should be the people's government," the men said.

Mr. Liu's account of the military meeting in Wuhan evoked memories of Mao Zedong's maneuvering in the Cultural Revolution to retain control as other Communist leaders challenged him and the country spun out of control. Tragic Fate Seen for Deng

Mr. Deng called the meeting as Chairman of the Military Affairs Commission of the Party, the only official position he retains. Mr. Deng resigned as a member of the Politburo two years ago.

"Deng's decision to use force against the students is very stupid," Mr. Liu commented. "Now his fate is much more tragic than that of Chiang Kai-shek," the late head of the Chinese Nationalists who was forced to flee to Taiwan in 1949.

"Deng has nowhere to retreat to and no one to follow him now," Mr. Liu said.

As for the future, Mr. Liu suggested that some Communists might leave the official party to form rival Communist parties under new names. "This is the only hope, because there are no other organized groups than the Communist Party and the army," he said.

A version of this article appears in print on May 22, 1989, on Page A00010 of the National edition with the headline: UPHEAVAL IN CHINA; Dissident in the U.S. Hears of Deep Cracks in the Party.