

Shortages and Anarchy Begin to Cripple Beijing

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** MAY 23, 1989

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to archive_feedback@nytimes.com.

As the capital ends its third day of martial law, Beijing is finding itself crippled by shortages and disruptions of vital services. In the absence of an effective government in parts of the city, only student rule seems to have averted total collapse in the city.

Mail delivery has become sporadic and traffic jams abound. Most subway and bus service has been suspended. As a result, workers are forced to ride bicycles or walk, and they often arrive late to work, if they arrive at all.

There are desperate shortages of gasoline, electricity, vegetables, milk and eggs. Some key roads into the city are blocked by military convoys and citizens surrounding them, and the distribution network seems to have been further hampered by roadblocks and demonstrations throughout the city. 'Very Hard to Do Business'

"It's very hard to do business now," said a diplomat here. "When we invited some officials to lunch, they said they couldn't drive here because once they got out of their compound their drivers would join the demonstrators. So we had to send a diplomatic car to fetch them."

Nearly 90 buses have been used for the last week to shelter demonstrating students in central Tiananmen Square, and since martial law was declared on

Saturday, citizens have commandeered 200 buses and trolleys to use as roadblocks on streets they expect army troops to take into the city.

International organizations and embassies, including the United States Embassy, have recommended canceling nonessential travel to China, and some have told their staff members here in the capital to stay home at night. Others have suggested stocking up on candles, water, food and gasoline. At least one gas station that services many diplomats has been closed because its supplies ran out.

An Asian diplomat said that while some Chinese Government officials have tried to maintain the appearance of "business as usual," others have been more frank about their inability to receive state guests. The Queen of the Netherlands was to arrive Tuesday for a brief visit, but that was canceled, as was a trip by a senior official at a United Nations organization, the diplomat said. Students as Traffic Officers

That Beijing is operating at all is thanks largely to student organizers, who have taken over many of the responsibilities of government in the areas of the capital that they control. Because there are scarcely any police officers in the city center, the leaders have sent student groups to each major intersection to direct traffic.

As a result, traffic often moves along better than it did when the demonstrations first began and the police found themselves virtually powerless in the middle of traffic jams at rush hour.

In the absence of police officers, students also fill the police role of mediating arguments and stopping fights. A quarrel that broke out when a citizen demanded that a cook remove his chef's hat in a protest was resolved only when a student came along, giving the hat back to the chef and pacifying the citizen. 'No Need to Be Tense'

In a twist, the students have even been cast in the role of protector of the Government. Two rows of students have protected the entrance of the Communist Party headquarters, and others guard the nearby Great Hall of the People.

"Move along now, move along," the students say, just as gruffly as the police sometimes did a week or two ago. "Relax, relax, no need to be tense." The students have been able to maintain a degree of order, especially when the arrangement suits them.

When the crowds were at their thickest last week, students used their bodies to cordon off an ambulance lane and prevent jaywalking. Only those with a certain

pass could slip through the lines.

As intersections throughout the city turn into human blockades, often reinforced by a strategically parked truck or two, usually the slim outline of a student wearing a red or white bandanna around his head emerges from the boisterous crowd to direct civilian vehicles through the maze-like chaos. Free Soft Drinks and Receipts

Students are also conferred certain privileges these days. Some railway workers let students traveling in groups to ride free. And soft drink vendors in the Tiananmen Square area are now taking advantage of the boom in business by charging ordinary citizens double the ordinary price, while giving the refreshments free to students with an identification card.

Much of the respect for the students comes not only from the battle they are waging for democracy, but also because of the efficiency they have displayed. A group of office workers contributed a large sum of money to the students' fund-raising effort, and was pleasantly surprised with a detailed receipt for the contribution.

A version of this article appears in print on May 23, 1989, on Page A00012 of the National edition with the headline: Shortages and Anarchy Begin to Cripple Beijing.