

## Aspiring Party Leaders At Forefront of Revolt

By FOX BUTTERFIELD and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 25, 1989

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Many of the early leaders of the student demonstrations in Beijing were sons or daughters of ranking Communist Party officials studying at People's University, a school intended to produce future senior Communists, an American scholar who has been doing research there says.

The scholar, Lee Feighon, a professor of Chinese history at Colby College in Maine, said the key role of these young Communists suggested that the pro-democracy protests in China "were originally not a movement against the party but a movement to reform the party."

"These were students who thought of themselves as the future leaders of the country and were upset by all the corruption and rigid bureaucratism they saw in their own party," Mr. Feighon said. "Their goal was to restore the prestige of being a party member, not to destroy the party."

Mr. Feighon said that many foreigners as well as some Chinese had misunderstood the origins of the demonstrations, attributing them to students at nearby Beijing University, China's most prestigious school, where the students have fewer ties to the Communist Party and more interest in the West. Leaders of Protest Movement

Students from Beijing University did play an important role later in the

movement as it grew, Mr. Feighon acknowledged. But he said that, based on his own observations, it was students from the lesser-known People's University who had taken the lead at critical times.

Mr. Feighon, who spent a month living in a dormitory on People's University campus during his fourth stay there in recent years, said the organizers were all students from the Party History Department, the only department at any Chinese university devoted to studying the history of the Chinese Communist Party.

"These kids have all been carefully screened before they are admitted to the Party History Department," Mr. Feighon said in a telephone interview. "Everybody knows they are well-connected and are being groomed to be the future Communist leaders of China."

Among the students at People's University, for example, is a grandson of Mao Zedong. He was initially admitted to the Party History Department, Mr. Feighon said, but an order from the Central Committee later prohibited him from joining it, so he was made a student in the general history department. But the younger Mao "hangs around with the Party History Department crowd," Mr. Feighon related.

Unlike most of China's best college students, Mr. Feighon said, the students in the Party History Department are not studying with hopes of going abroad. "They are traditionalists in the Chinese sense, seriously interested in Chinese history and the Party." Party's Loss of Prestige

Nevertheless, he said, they recognize that since the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960's the party has suffered a huge loss of legitimacy and they are not as eager for a career in the Party as earlier generations of Chinese were. A poll he took of 34 undergraduates in the Party History Department found that 30 of them had wanted to be assigned to other fields. In China, the Government decides which students will be admitted to which department and which university.

Still, it was a group of graduate and undergraduate students from People's University Party History Department who took the action that sparked the student demonstrations. Late in the evening of April 15, after the announcement of the death of Hu Yaobang, the ousted party General Secretary and a leading advocate of liberalization, they went to Tiananmen Square to lay wreaths in his honor. What made their action even bolder, Mr. Feighon said, was that they put the name of their school and department on the wreaths.

Two days later, students in the Party History Department began a boycott of

classes, demanding a reappraisal of Mr. Hu's career. He was removed in early 1987 after being charged with being too lenient toward an early series of student protests. Students in the department then formed a militia enforcing the strike throughout People's University, and the idea later spread to other schools in the city.

On April 17, Mr. Feighon said, it was again students from the Party History Department who formulated plans for a large march into Tiananmen Square on the day of Mr. Hu's funeral, the first large student march into central Beijing. Defiance of Crackdown

And most important, on April 27, after Deng Xiaoping, China's senior leader, had called for a crackdown on any further student activities, it was students from People's University who led a procession into central Beijing, pushing past police lines for the first time. "The night before, you could hear loudspeakers all across campus warning students not to go out, but the next morning the kids from the Party History Department came out in formation, like a Roman legion, with their arms linked," Mr. Feighon said.

"They were out front all day, putting their bodies on the line," Mr. Feighon recalled. "When they came back that night, for the first time workers and other people treated them like heroes, joining in to give them food and support. Those students who hadn't marched felt pretty left out."

Each time before the students set out, they called their parents or grandparents, many of whom hold high office. "If the troops fire on the students, I just want you to know they'll be firing on me," Mr. Feighon reported the students saying telling their relatives.

At first some of the students had treated the demonstrations like a panty raid, he said, with some simply throwing small bottles out their windows as a prank. Mr. Deng's given name rhymes with the word for small bottle.

But most of those in the Party History Department were serious, taking their inspiration from the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Feighon said. "They weren't looking to re-enact it, but to learn lessons from it. It taught them that students do have the power to topple a corrupt bureaucracy and that one old man should not have too much power," he said.

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