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Upheaval in China; Students Plan for Hurdle: Zhao's Fall

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** MAY 26, 1989

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Six students lay crunched on a single sleeping bag near a plastic tent in preparation for a long night and possibly many more, as they began to discuss their plans for demonstrating if the rumors were true that their main supporter in the leadership was to about to fall.

"We will just continue our sit-in," said Lu Qingtao, a 20-year-old student from Xian, a central city. "And some of us will return to our campuses in the provinces to stir up the movement there."

His colleague, 20-year-old Tan Yong, said, "In China, we have a saying that those who violate the people's will, shall perish; those who honor the people's will, shall flourish."

The implication was that Prime Minister Li Peng was too unpopular to sustain control for very long and that perhaps the Communist Party leader, Zhao Ziyang, would return to power. What if Zhao Is Forced Out? After demonstrating for nearly six weeks for more democracy, China's university students seem scarcely fazed by the possibility that their actions may be hastening the demise of the most prominent advocate of liberalization among China's top leaders.

While the situation remains very uncertain, there have been signs in the last few days that the intense power struggle unfolding behind the walled-in compound

of the leaders may result in the rise of Mr. Li and the fall of Mr. Zhao, who boldly came out in support of the student movement.

"If Zhao Ziyang is forced to resign, the students aren't to blame," said H. Duan, a 21-year-old mathematics student who had traveled from his university in Shanxi Province. "It is the fault of the Government and of Li Peng's declaration of martial law."

A key question these days is how students will react if Mr. Zhao is ousted from power and if Prime Minister Li ascends and retains control over the Government. Will they take to the streets in even greater numbers? Or will they accept the power play and retreat in the face of a crackdown, as they did in early 1987.

For now, students say they will demonstrate with even more vigor, although they admit that the protests in the capital have diminished in the last few days. The demonstration of 100,000 students and intellectuals today was smaller than those last week.

Students are resting, they say, adding that they will not be intimidated by military actions this time.

"Even if the Government resorts to armed force, it won't solve the underlying problem," said a 26-year-old teacher involved in the movement. "Can we say that this Government is legal with so many people standing up against it? If the Government is incapable of solving the problem, it should be dissolved."

Many students seem to have considered the possibility that Mr. Zhao could be forced to resign, especially as rumors of his ouster circulated widely in the capital today. But much as they dislike the thought, they seem to distance the student movement from any connection with his downfall and in fact emphasize that the severe action could fan the protests even more. Student Movement's Potential

"Whatever intense and extreme measures that the Government takes will help it dig its own grave," said Lu Xiaobo, a well-known young scholar in Chinese Literature at Beijing Normal University. "The leaders' actions will instigate greater discontent and arouse stronger reaction. The student movement will only become larger."

Indeed, students said that whatever changes transpire within the leadership, they would continue to camp out at central Tiananmen Square until their demands for democracy are met.

Although the square seemed to be filled with students from other provinces who had come to support their colleagues in Beijing, several students from outside

the capital said they did not believe the movement had yet become fully national.

So far, they said, it is only beginning to realize its potential in cities outside the capital. When every city is in the same turmoil as Beijing, they suggested, then the Government will really feel the pressure. Students With Fresh Enthusiasm

A group of students who arrived today from Xian, where protests turned violent last month, spoke with the fresh enthusiasm of students embarking on their first major demonstration. Although protests have occurred in more than 20 cities throughout China, none have been as protracted and intense as those in Beijing.

While many students seem concerned about a military crackdown, the majority say that if it comes its effect will not be longlasting.

"Even if Li Peng crushed us this time, it would only be temporary, since the Government won't last long after suppressing us," said Lu Qingtao, the Xian student. "And the next government will be careful to listen to our demands."

Although many students would prefer that Mr. Zhao remain in power, some students displayed exasperation with the power struggle, which they believe is caused by a system of rule by individual rather than rule by law.

"That's China for you," a Beijing university lecturer said. "Mr. Zhao's downfall is just something out of the students' control."

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