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Beijing Reports Arrest of 11 Protesters

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 31, 1989

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The Government said today that it had arrested 11 workers involved in China's democracy movement, and official news programs bitterly condemned a copy of the Statue of Liberty that students put up in Tiananmen Square in central Beijing.

The arrests were apparently the first since the democracy movement began in mid-April and were the clearest sign so far of a crackdown against participants in the movement. Since the unrest began, the Government has been sternly announcing crackdowns, only to balk before the actions can be carried out.

The 11 people arrested were leaders of a motorcycle club that played an important role in the recent demonstrations. The official New China News Agency reported that they had been arrested for disturbing the public order. The Beijing Daily News said the club had been disbanded. Vivid Feature of Protests

The band of several hundred motorcyclists screeching around the city had become one of the most vivid features of recent protests, and the band played an important role in informing the protest headquarters in Tiananmen Square about what was happening in other parts of the city.

After martial law was declared on May 20, the motorcyclists searched for military convoys entering the city and alerted residents when troops were approaching.

"The riders distributed leaflets and shouted inciting slogans," the press agency quoted a police official as having said. "They spread rumors like 'the army is suppressing the students' to confuse and poison the people's minds."

The motorcyclists have not been seen for several days and it is not clear whether they have given up their activities and returned to their jobs. Statue Called an Insult

The television news tonight included long criticisms of the 27-foot-tall copy of the Statue of Liberty put up early this morning on Tiananmen Square. The students are calling the statue the Goddess of Democracy, and it seems to have caught the imagination of many Beijing residents.

"The erection of a so-called statue of a goddess is an insult to our national dignity and mocks our nation's image," a television announcer said.

The news program said a citizen had urged the Government to tear down the statue by Thursday, a children's holiday in China and a time when many young people are expected to visit the square. The citizen was quoted as having called for the removal of the statue "to protect the souls of children from unwholesome influences."

Whether the criticisms of the statue meant that the Government would send policemen or troops to haul it away was not clear. While the statue is a constant affront to the Government's authority, any move to tear it down could start a confrontation with students and workers who are determined to protect it.

In addition, the art students who built the sculpture were careful to construct it so that it would be difficult to remove without first smashing it into pieces. And the authorities would presumably hesitate to be photographed smashing a copy of the Statue of Liberty. 'You Have Been Unmasked'

About 1,000 people today attended a rally in front of police offices called by an independent workers union to protest what it said was the arrest of three union leaders. The police would not confirm the arrests, which were in addition to the 11 acknowledged by the authorities.

"You snatch our people stealthily; you have been unmasked," read a banner held by the demonstrators in front of the State Security Bureau. The five-day-old union says it has thousands of supporters in the capital, and the Government seems to have been even more worried about the risks of worker protests than of student demonstrations.

Li Zhihua, the 27-year-old wife of Qian Yumin, a union leader who was

reported seized at 11 P.M. on Monday, said: "At first I didn't want him to participate in the organization. Now, because of the way things have developed, I myself am prepared to join."

In another sign that the Government may be ready to carry out some provisions of the crackdown ordered 10 days ago, the Foreign Ministry called on foreign journalists today to obey regulations that essentially forbid any interviews during the period of martial law. The restrictions have not been put into effect, although a few reporters have been warned to stop interviews.

There was little new information today on the power struggle that has paralyzed the Government for two weeks and that for now seems likely to lead to the dismissal of the Communist Party leader, Zhao Ziyang. Documents circulating among party members criticize Mr. Zhao, and some Central Committee members have reportedly been called to meetings in which they have been encouraged to criticize the party leader. Meeting Not Yet Called

But a Central Committee meeting to purge Mr. Zhao - of whom there has been no official mention in the Chinese press for 10 days - still has not been called, and at least some committee members are not even in the capital, foreign diplomats say.

An Asian diplomat said there were signs that the faction of Prime Minister Li Peng was having difficulty gaining the unanimity or near-unanimity it would like for its condemnation of Mr. Zhao, and that there was discussion of charging him with milder offenses and even of allowing him to retain a seat on the ruling Politburo after he has been stripped of his post.

In contrast to some of the harsh attacks in recent days on "a very, very small number" of plotters scheming to overthrow Communism, People's Daily published an unusually mild editorial today calling for more democracy but warning that this will not be achieved quickly.

"We must concentrate on economic construction," the editorial said, without offering any threats or referring to anti-party cabals.

There has been some variety in the press, so one mild editorial does not necessarily signify a trend. But there have been some signs that the party has been concerned about the alarm at home and abroad over the prospect of a its leadership, and a softer line may be a response to such concerns.

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