

## **The Party Pulls the Trigger**

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BEIJING -- From behind a burning bus barricade Saturday night comes the gunfire of soldiers advancing toward Tiananmen Square. The shots are answered by the angry yells of thousands of citizens defending Chang An Road about two miles west of the square. People snatch up bricks and bottles, their only weapons against the guns of their country's own army. Then, faces grim, they start to fall back. The soldiers overrun the flaming roadblock, and under the midnight sky can be seen as a dark line of helmets moving fast toward the crowd. Panicked, people turn and run back a few hundred yards to rally by the next bus barricade. Bullets ricochet off the stone walls that line the road. A young man, blood running from his forehead, stumbles toward the sidewalk.

The crowd sets fire to a bus and a truck at this next barricade. When the truck's gas tank explodes, a man's pants catch fire. He runs screaming down the street, people beating at his clothes with their hands to put out the flames. Nearby, a woman climbs up on a pylon to watch the troops. Three men pull her down to safety as bullets crack into the walls just ahead. The soldiers keep coming, and behind them now shine the headlights of armored personnel carriers -- their treads shaking the pavement. As the crowd falls back again, a man in thick spectacles stops a Western reporter to volunteer in English a comment that will be heard many times before dawn Sunday. "Terrible," he says. "Very terrible."

There is no way of knowing how many wounded and dead lie behind them; demonstrators later that night will estimate that between 40 and 70 died on Chang An Road alone, one of several routes along which thousands of soldiers are shooting their way toward the square. On Sunday, the Chinese Red Cross estimated the night's fatalities at 2,600.

With this slaughter, China's communist government has uncloaked itself before the world. The Chinese themselves have known for decades that they are ruled by a party that will do anything -- including impoverish and periodically butcher them -- to ensure its own survival. Since Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, the hope has been that his economic reforms would bring a corresponding measure of political freedom. The showdown these past six weeks between China's people and its institutionalized tyrants shows that Mr. Deng and his fellow party leaders prefer a China that is poor and under their totalitarian sway to one that is rich and free.

Student calls for democracy that began with the April 15 death of a disgraced moderate former party chief, Hu Yaobang, bloomed into a national movement in which millions of people across China demonstrated for freedom. Students came from all over the country to join the mass protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, and for a few brave weeks they occupied the square's Monument to China's Revolutionary Heroes, broadcasting their call for democracy. This weekend the party ended its secret deliberations over how to handle this affront to its imperial powers. Tanks and troops now occupy the square, leaving no doubt who owns this site once dedicated by Mao Tse-tung to the building of a People's Republic.

So far as it's been possible to discern anything of the shrouded party machinations during these sleepless weeks in Beijing, the battle between unarmed citizens and the army reflects an inside party fight for supremacy. This has pitted China's reform-minded party chief Zhao Ziyang, against a paint-by-numbers, Soviet-trained Stalinist, Premier Li Peng. Mr. Zhao, who expressed some sympathy for the students' democratic demands, has been reported under house arrest since about May 25. Mr. Li, who on May 19 announced the martial law that finally prevailed this weekend in Beijing, seems for now the victor.

It is a victory that the Chinese will remember with horror for generations. By 1:30 Sunday morning, the troops shooting their way up Chang An Road had reached Tiananmen . There they linked up with thousands more soldiers who had fought similarly one-sided battles. By this time the hundreds of thousands of people who had turned out earlier in their best weekend clothes to support the demonstrators had fled. Soldiers began firing tracer bullets low at the small groups still roaming the huge square, especially those among the tent encampments near the white Goddess of Liberty statue put up by the demonstrators last Monday night. Some students remained in their tents. A few thousand gathered on the two-tiered monument, sitting under their school banners in the warm spring night breeze. Some of the workers who had been laboring out of a tent in the square to form an independent trade federation -- which they billed as a Chinese version of Poland's Solidarity -- crouched along the sidewalks, still supporting the students on the monument.

Rapidly the troops sealed off all but the south end of the square. Troops, trucks and armored personnel carriers lined up along the northern perimeter and soldiers took up positions around them -- firing sporadically at the demonstrators. More troops filled the steps of the Great Hall of the People to the west, and the steps of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and History to the east. On the steps of the museum there were at least 4,000 soldiers, armed with AK-47s and long clubs. By 2:30 a.m. the students were faced on three sides by tens of thousands of troops.

Gunfire kept coming from the north end of the square. In half an hour spent near the hospital tent, I saw seven students with bullet wounds carried in by fellow demonstrators. One young man, shot in the right side of his chest and bleeding heavily, was rushed in from the northwest corner.

Half a dozen more were brought in from the northeast, where a bus driver had just made a suicidal attempt to stop the soldiers by ramming his bus into an armored personnel carrier. Soldiers dragged the driver from the bus and carried him out of sight. Students later said he had been killed by the troops.

In their efforts to stave off invasion of the square, or at least register their outrage, demonstrators set fire to a bus and an armored personnel carrier at the north end of the square. This brought more gunfire from the troops.

From 2 a.m. until about 4 a.m. came a chilling standoff. The students refused to leave the monument, saying, "We are not afraid to die." From a loudspeaker set up on the monument during the three-week occupation of the square, a popular singer from Taiwan, Hau De Jian, broadcast messages. "Please everybody," he pleaded, "Use nonviolent means." While he spoke, huge government loudspeakers mounted on the lamp posts broadcast warnings that the troops would take any measures necessary to clear the square: "If you do not leave, we cannot guarantee your safety." From the student loudspeaker came the stirring communist anthem, the Internationale, which the demonstrators played many times that night. From both the north and south ends of the square, again came the bullets.

Some of the workers along the edge of the square seized this relatively calm period to approach the troops on the steps of the museum and try to reason with them. It was a tactic that had worked two weeks before, and again this past Friday night, when soldiers headed toward Tiananmen had been rebuffed peacefully by friendly citizens. This time it did not work. One Western diplomat here suggests that the troops who marched into the square this weekend were ethnic minorities from the north who do not speak Mandarin.

On the curb nearby crouched a plastics-factory worker, chain-smoking in the gloom. He said he had decided to stay in the square because "the students represent the power of the people of the whole country." He also said that the government had ordered many workers to attend a pro-government demonstration scheduled for Monday. For this, he said, they would be paid extra and

given the day off. "What a bloody awful government," said a businessman who also was keeping watch.

At 4 a.m. the streetlamps went out, and in the darkness armored personnel carriers drove past the monument. The spectators along the edges of the square began moving toward the southern exits. The students stayed put, and again played the Internationale.

Then the singer from Taiwan broadcast the message, "We have already won a great victory." He appealed to the army to send over representatives to negotiate with the students. Shortly before 5 a.m. the lights came back on, revealing troops now standing up, weapons ready for a rush toward the monument. The army warned that it had been given orders to clear the square by 7 a.m. at the latest.

At 5 a.m. the students announced they were ready to leave. They began filing down the steps of the monument, singing and carrying their school banners. The soldiers closed in fast. By 5:05, the first one had reached the top steps, his rifle held ready to fire. Hundreds more soldiers leapt up the steps, shoving students who were still climbing down. At short-range gunpoint the students paraded south, and by 5:20 the monument was completely occupied by soldiers. They set to work at once, tearing down the pro-democracy banners and shooting at the loudspeakers set up by the demonstrators.

Armored personnel carriers sped in to crush the tents, then gunned their engines and drove after the retreating demonstrators, who kept turning back to watch. Thousands more troops marched into the square and took up formation on both sides of the Mao mausoleum, near the southern border. Still reluctant to surrender, students moved toward them, shouting "Fascists! Fascism!" until the soldiers again began shooting. Still chanting "Fascists!" and "Down with Li Peng!" the students began their long marches back to the campuses.

By this time the sun was coming up, and Beijing's residents had begun gathering again. Some took up the call of "Fascists!" Most stood in small groups near doorways, looking anxiously toward the sound of gunfire still coming from the square. In the streets for miles around lay the debris of the night's battle. Broken glass, twisted bicycles, crushed fencing, and at many intersections the smoking frames of burned buses, trucks and overturned cars. Beijing's citizens had in their desperation torn up the sidewalks for brick ammunition and in some places even had dug up trees to topple across the roads.

About a mile down Chang An Road lay the most gruesome sign of the anger with which Beijing's people suffered army occupation. It was the corpse of a PLA soldier captured during the night by civilians who had stripped off his uniform and beaten him to death. In the morning light, people mobbed the body, spitting and throwing bricks at it.

A few minutes later, they scattered in terror before a convoy of armored personnel carriers that were clearing the access roads to the square. After they passed, the people regrouped, only to flee again a few minutes later from a convoy of at least 35 tanks speeding into Tiananmen. As the tanks rolled past, several dozen young men ran into the street, stoning the tanks and screaming insults at the soldiers. The spectators at first ran into the alleys, fearful of retaliation, then came back to watch and finally to cheer the stone-throwers.

It was the fury of people who for years have felt themselves betrayed by a government that on the basis of nothing but its guns claims to rule in their name. If China's democratic uprising has achieved nothing else, it has at least flushed into view the naked shape of China's Communist Party. The students, joined at the height of the protests by millions of others across China, demanded democracy and its attendant rights to speak freely and be governed not by the party line, but by an independent rule of law. The party first responded with such Orwellian slogans as

"Resolutely support the fight against bourgeois liberalization"; then it got down to straightforward murder.

There were other important aspects of this uprising, however, that may yet help undermine the grotesque party apparatus. This May was to have been a time of triumphs for China's despots, who like to present a semi-civilized face to the world, for which they reap loans, aid and a modicum of international respect. On May 4-6, China hosted the Asian Development Bank's annual meeting. And May 15-18 was the grand Gorbachev summit.

To appear respectable hosts, China's rulers had to put up some front of responsiveness to the needs of 1.1 billion citizens. So when the protests that followed Mr. Hu's death kept growing in late April and on into mid-May, Mr. Deng and his party loyalists couldn't simply order in the tanks. They had to let the demonstrations go on.

China's people turned the government's sham into a genuine chance to speak their minds, achieving a fleeting safety in numbers. One of communism's prime repressive weapons is that it isolates and intimidates individuals who might want to criticize the system. Most people are assigned for life to work units, each with its resident political overseer and informer. It's dangerous to trust strangers, and because there is no clear rule of law, anyone can at any time become a victim of the latest shift in party line, or simply of politically influential enemies.

These past six weeks, China's people have seized the chance to talk relatively freely with one another. They were able to experiment with genuine political debate, and to see that they do indeed have the potential -- if they can somehow break free of Communist Party rule -- to fashion a democratic society.

It's likely that China's more liberal thinkers now face a period of terror. Many already have been threatened with arrest. The Beijing regime already has so damaged its international standing that it has little left to lose. Late last night, troops were still moving into Beijing and soldiers were firing into civilian crowds.

But for Mr. Deng and his party followers, this democratic uprising and its horrible suppression may yet turn out to have been the first major tremor of a movement that could someday crack the communist bedrock. Sunday morning, just about half a mile up the road from the tanks now occupying Tiananmen Square, protesters were stoning and burning a bus at one of the surviving barricades. Sunday evening, people stood at the edge of one of the roads into the square jeering at the soldiers, who kept opening fire. According to an eyewitness account by a Western diplomat, people were still protesting last night on the northwest outskirts of Beijing.

The white Goddess of Liberty statue in Tiananmen Square was gone by daybreak Sunday. No doubt when the Chinese government has finished dealing with its people, the tidy square will be presented again as a suitable site for tourists, visiting dignitaries and the Chinese public to come honor the heroes of China's glorious revolution. It will be important then to remember the heroes of 1989, the people who cried out so many times these past six weeks, "Tell the world what we want. Tell the truth about China."

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