

Questions

1. What seems to be the students' primary focus in the demands included in their petition?
2. Why would the government hesitate to even receive such a petition?

Seven-Point Petition:

1. Reevaluate the merits and faults of Hu Yaobang.
2. Negate the previous "anti-spiritual pollution" and "anti-bourgeois Liberation" movements.
3. Allow private newspapers and freedom of speech.
4. Publicly publish the government leaders' income and property holdings.
5. Abolish Beijing's "Ten-Point Restrictions" [restricting public assembly and demonstrations].
6. Increase education funding and improve treatment of intellectuals.
7. Report this movement truthfully.

13.9 TRANSCRIPT OF MAY 18 MEETING BETWEEN PREMIER LI PENG AND STUDENTS (MAY 18, 1989)

To appease the student hunger strikers, Prime Minister Li Peng agreed to meet with the top student representatives. Among the student leaders were Wang Dan of Beijing University and Wu'erkaixi (Örkesh Dölet), a Uyghur from the northwestern autonomous region of Xinjiang. They sensed that popular opinion was on their side, as the students displayed little patience for the standard government platitudes. Throughout the meeting, the student leaders did not soften their delivery, interrupting Li Peng, lecturing, and deliberately addressing him by titles other than Prime Minister (Wu'erkaixi even attended the meeting wearing his pajamas, a clear breach of etiquette). Li Peng and the hardliners were not amused and felt their efforts at reconciliation received only insulting responses. Two days later, the Central Committee voted to impose martial law, with Zhao Ziyang as the only dissenting vote.

Questions

1. What is Premier Li Peng's primary goal as stated in the following transcript?
2. Why are Wang Dan and the student leaders so concerned with the movement being labeled as a disturbance?

Li Peng (premier):

I am so pleased to meet with you all. This meeting came together a bit late. I apologize for this. . . . To be frank, today I am hoping to discuss one topic only, and we can put aside the other topics until sometime in the future. The topic I would like to discuss is how to relieve the hunger strikers of their predicament as soon as possible. . . . It is not that we have other motives, it's simply that we mainly concerned about students. Frankly, I see how young you all are—I'd guess the oldest among you is about 22 or 23? My youngest child is older than you. I have three children. None of my children

ZHAO ZIYANG

(1919–2005)—A leading reformer under Deng Xiaoping and seen by many as his anointed heir, but his support for the student demonstrations in 1989 caused him to be stripped of all titles, and he spent the last 15 years of his life under house arrest until his death in 2005.

are engaged in profiteering by officials. None. They are all older than you. We look at you as if you were our own children, our own flesh and blood.

[Camera shows close-up shots of Li Peng speaking, with occasional pan shots of the room.]

Wu'erkaixi (student): *[Camera cuts to Wu'erkaixi as he interrupts]* Premier Li, our time is limited. We can sit down and have a drink here, but there are students outside who are sitting on the cold ground and starving on the Square. I'm sorry to butt in, but our hope is to begin a substantial dialogue as soon as possible. Sorry, to interrupt, because you are like an elder.

Li Peng: It does not matter. You are not very, not very . . .

Wu'erkaixi: *[interrupting]* Not very polite.

Li Peng: It does not matter.

Wu'erkaixi: It's not that it does not matter. You have just said that this meeting is a little late. The fact is that we asked for a meeting with you as early as April 22nd at Tiananmen Square. Therefore, this meeting is not only a little late, but too late. However, it doesn't matter, it's good you are here now. *[words indistinct]*. You said we were going to discuss only one question. In fact, it is not that you asked us to come for discussion, but that the great number of people at the Square asked you to come out for a talk. The topics of discussion should be decided by us. Fortunately, we agree that there is only one, and just one, question that needs to be discussed. Therefore, let us discuss just this single question.

Many students have already fainted. But this is not my point. What is important is to solve the problem. How can the problem be solved? I think that it is good that you have finally come out and shown your sincerity to resolve the problem. We read and listened to Comrade Zhao Ziyang's written statement yesterday and the day before *[in which Zhao indicated that the students demands for democracy were reasonable and patriotic, and promised there would be no retaliation]*. Why haven't the students left? Why did we stay after Comrade Zhao Ziyang's speech? I believe you know are clear on this as well. We regard the written statement as insufficient. It's truly insufficient. I believe that you are aware of the prevailing conditions at the Square. If such conditions continue, then it is likely we will not be here to continue to discuss matters with you. Premier Li, it may seem like I am over-exaggerating a bit. Please think about this: Should the slightest misstep unfold at the Square, or should a student . . . I do not want to elaborate further.

[Wu'erkaixi motions to Wang Dan, seated next to Wu'erkaixi, to speak.]

[Video shows shots of Wang Dan speaking, but he does not face the speaker directly, thus making his comments difficult to hear.]

Wang Dan (student): Let me report on the current situation. So far, some 2,000 [students] have fainted and lost consciousness. [*words indistinct*] On the contrary, the students' emotions are reaching new highs. As to how we can bring the hunger strike to an end so that the students will leave the Square? Our requests must be addressed thoroughly. Moreover, you might have all seen, yesterday's demonstration, the street was filled with demonstrators. Several million people came out in support. What we proposed were very clear. [*words indistinct*] A government must pay attention to people's wishes to solve the problem as soon as possible. Therefore, our stand is clear that the two conditions proposed by students must be implemented before the hunger strike students would end their strike [*words indistinct*].

Wu'erkaixi: Because your age, please allow me to address you as "Teacher Li," if I may. Teacher Li, the problem now lies not in persuading us [*the student representatives*]. First, as we have already stated clearly, we too wish very much for the students to leave the Square. Second, even if you succeed in utterly convincing us here, it would be pointless. The situation at the Square is dictated not by the standard rule of a minority following majority. Instead it's more like 99.9 percent of the students obeying the 0.1 percent. If a single student refuses to leave, I believe then thousands will also choose to stay.

Wang Dan: After Comrade Yan Mingfu's talk, we conducted a survey among over a hundred students yesterday, on the question of evacuating the Square. 99.9% students voted against withdrawing from the Square. . .

Wang Zhixin (student): [*interrupting*] If [government decision] is put off any longer, it is not only the students will be unable to control themselves, but also citizens more generally. . . . [*Video shows Li Peng nodding his head.*] I have another question to ask the government. On April 22nd, we went down on our knees for a long time to present our petition. However, you did not show up despite our repeated request for you to do so. . . . One more question. I wonder how the government is going to respond to this. At present, different types of people, including aunties, grandpas and grandmas, and whole families, have joined our ranks. I wonder what the government thinks of this. There are people as old as 80 and as young as just a few years old. Small children formed a line marching in an orderly

Li Peng:

way, shouting slogans, and crying: Big brothers, sisters, drink some water; eat something. [...]

I would like to express my views on several points. Everyone is interested in discussing substantive issues. First, I want to discuss one substantive issue. I propose that the China Red Cross Society and its chapter in Beijing responsibly and safely send the hunger strikers to various hospitals. I hope that all other students at the square will help and support this operation. This is my concrete proposal. . . . This morning, Comrades Ziyang myself and other comrades visited some of the students [in hospitals].

Second point is that neither the government nor the party Central Committee have ever said that the broad masses of students were creating turmoil. We have never said such a thing. We have unanimously affirmed the patriotic aspirations of everyone. . . . Nevertheless, the situation may develop independently of your good ideas, fine intentions, and patriotic fervor. This an objective principle no one can control it. In fact, there is complete chaos in Beijing. Moreover, chaos has spread throughout the country. . . . I can state that during the past few days, Beijing has been in a state of anarchy. I hope comrades will think what consequences might be brought about by this situation.

The government of the People's Republic of China is a government responsible to the people. It is impossible for us to be indifferent to this phenomenon. It is impossible for us not to protect the safety and lives of students, not to protect factories, not to protect our socialist system. Whether or not you are willing to listen to what I have said, I am really pleased to have the opportunity to say it. I want to tell you that it is absolutely not my intention to impose anything on you, because some things are independent of man's will. Much unrest has occurred in China. Many people did not want unrest to occur, but it occurred anyway. . . . I have finished what I wanted to say.

[...]

Xiong Yan (student):

I'd like to add one more point. Dear Comrade Li Peng, just now you brought up the point that there are signs of a disturbance in society. I will speak briefly for 3 minutes, offering the simplest explanation of the difference between a student movement and a disturbance. If a disturbance occurs in a country or a society, does it have a direct cause-and-effect relationship with a student demonstration? I say no. A disturbance in a country or society is not caused

by student demonstrations, but by the social system in existence, the ills of society. It does not have a direct cause-and-effect relationship with student demonstrations. The very purpose of student demonstrations is to expose the ills of society at an early date so that the government can deal with them and overcome the ills without delay. Thus, the student movement or the movement to promote democracy will indeed serve to prevent society from falling apart and avoid a real disturbance. The argument is utmost simple explanation. This is what I want to say.

[. . .]

Wang Zhixin:

[*interrupting*] I want to make one point. At the beginning it was said that this is a meeting not a dialogue.

Li Peng:

[*interrupting*] Yes, it is a meeting. See you again.

Yan Mingfu (student):

Premier Li Peng is having talks with a foreign delegation in the next hour. . . [Video shows Li Peng standing up, shaking the hands of the students before departing for his next meeting.]

13.10 THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BEIJING TURMOIL (1989)

If you ask many young Chinese today about “June fourth,” or show the famous “tank man” photo of a man standing unarmed and attempting to single-handedly stop a line of tanks (see chapter visual source), most will offer a blank look in return or only be able to give the vaguest of details. The Tiananmen massacre remains not simply heavily censored today in China but almost entirely erased, in what one journalist referred to as “a complicit act of mass amnesia.” The following government account (published bilingually in Chinese and English) offers valuable insight into how the Chinese state immediately, deliberately, and with an amazing degree of thoroughness rewrote the events surrounding the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. While much of the following article might ring false to Western ears, the over-riding concern with maintaining stability and suppressing violent elements is viewed as a quite legitimate issue for the central government to police by most Chinese.

Questions

1. In what ways does the article attempt to vilify the students and demonstrators involved in the 1989 Tiananmen events?
2. Why would the government want to publish and distribute such an account of these events?

When Hu Yaobang suddenly died on April 15, a handful of people, thinking that their time had come, stirred up a student upheaval on the pretext of “mourning” for Hu Yaobang. The student unrest had been taken advantage of by the organizers of the turmoil from the very beginning. In violation of the Constitution, laws and regulations, some people put up big-character posters everywhere on the college campuses, preaching bourgeois liberalization and calling for the overthrow of the Communist Party and the legal government. They held many rallies, made speeches, boycotted classes and organized demonstrations, all without permission; they stormed the seat of the Party Central Committee and