

8.14 Tiananmen Square Protest (1989)

Background: On June 4, 1989 the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) violently cleared Beijing's Tiananmen Square of protesters ending a six-week long demonstration that called for democracy and political reform in China. The protests began in April 1989 and gained support as the Chinese Communist Party and the government made concessions. On May 13, more than 100 students began a hunger strike and they were joined by thousands of others during the next few days. On May 19, a rally at Tiananmen Square drew an estimated 1.2 million people. In response, the government declared martial law and 10,000 troops were mobilized. As they faced the troops, the student slogan was "We are not looking for death! We are seeking the true life!"

Estimates of the number of protesters killed on June 4 ranged from hundreds to thousands. The next day an unidentified man stood in the street blocking a column of Chinese tanks. He remained there for several minutes before being pulled away.



Questions

1. What did the student protesters demand?
2. How did the hunger strike generate greater public support?
3. Why did the manifesto stress the rights and responsibilities of citizens?
4. In your opinion, why did the Chinese Communist government use violence to end a peaceful protest?

Tiananmen Square Hunger Strikers Manifesto (June 2, 1989)

Source: <http://www.standoffat Tiananmen.com/2010/10/document-of-1989-four-gentlemans-hunger.html>

A. The current democratic movement, unprecedented in China's history, has always used legal, non-violent, and rational means to appeal for liberty, democracy, and human rights. However, the Li Peng regime went so far as to mobilize a military force of hundreds of thousands to suppress the unarmed students and people of all walks. Therefore, we start our hunger strike, not for petition, but for protesting the martial law and military rule! We advocate the pushing for progress in China's democratization with peaceful means and we are against any form of violence. However, we are not afraid of violence. We want to use peaceful means to demonstrate the toughness of our civil and democratic force, to demolish the undemocratic order supported by bayonets and lies! This ultra-foolish act of using martial law and military rule against students and masses in peaceful petition establishes a precedence of the very worst kind, put the Communist Party, the government, and the military in shame, and destroys the fruit of a decade of reform and openness in a single day.

B. We call upon the whole society to gradually abandon the spectator and mere sympathy attitudes and build up a true sense of citizenship. First and foremost, citizenship is a sense of political equality. Every citizen must have the self-confidence that his own political rights is equal to that of the Premier. Secondly, citizenship is not only justice and sympathy, but also a rational urge of participation. This is also the sense of political responsibility. Every person does not just sympathize and support but participate directly in the democratic reconstruction. Finally, citizenship is the consciousness of taking responsibilities and obligations.