

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

An Anthropological Study of Chinese Reform
and the 1989 People's Movement in Beijing

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1. INTRODUCTION

In March 1989 the Chinese National People's Congress¹ met in Beijing for its annual plenary session. This meeting had been awaited with some anticipation. The previous year, the People's Congress had been dominated by the reform policies announced half a year earlier at the 13th National Party Congress by Zhao Ziyang, the secretary general of the Communist Party (Zhao 1987). Then, the People's Congress had witnessed unprecedentedly lively debates during which the delegates made no secret of their dissatisfaction with those reforms they thought too radical.

However, in 1989 the political situation had changed drastically. A sudden price liberalization in the summer of 1988 had led to a year of high inflation and panic buying. Conservative leaders, such as Premier Li Peng, had used the opportunity to gain approval for a new policy of economic stabilization and partial restoration of central control. The 1989 meeting of the People's Congress would be the first important public test for these policies. Much depended therefore on the smooth progress of the meeting, and beforehand the delegates received clear instructions to keep their criticism of the government to themselves.

The conservatives did have to pay a political price for this though. In his report to the Congress, Premier Li Peng had to admit that his government had made mistakes and that the policies of stabilization, although correct in themselves, had not been an unqualified success (Li Peng 1989).

Despite Li's apologetic words many people were left feeling

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disappointed. Progressive intellectuals, for instance, had expected the issue of the political prisoners to have been raised as a result of the impact made by a petitioning movement which had preceded the Congress.² Moreover, the simple fact that the voice of the People's Congress could be muffled so simply and effectively showed yet again that the government's political reforms could not be taken seriously. Most importantly, the government's statement that China's economic problems could only be solved by at least two years of austerity was highly unpopular with the majority of the urban population who depended on fixed state sector wages. The People's Congress clearly showed that the conservative government asked a lot from the population, but had very little to offer in return.

Nevertheless, the situation was not regarded as especially alarming, and practically no one had expected that almost the entire population of Beijing would be out in the streets less than two months after the conclusion of the Congress. With the benefit of hindsight it can be said that the chronic moral crisis, which I have discussed in Part II, would inevitably lead to an acute political crisis as well. Yet, this moral crisis can never explain the timing, nature and development of the political crisis.

The theory of practice which was developed in Part I of this book is therefore directly relevant. It helps us to understand a concrete event like the People's Movement as a product of unique actions based on pre-existent discursive relations of power, knowledge and morality. The tradition of protest, the bureaucratized social structure, the party ideology, Western political thinking, and the general cynicism and disappointment about the government were translated into demonstrations, slogans, demands, speeches, and a hunger-strike. Moreover, the movement had its own dynamic. Groups and individuals learned from their experiences, and designed strategic reactions to the actions of other individual or group actors. Only by looking at the movement as an unfolding sequence of events and an interactional learning process have I been able to embark on the analysis which follows.

The People's Movement was not the straightforward confrontation that it appeared at first sight to be: a conflict between the forces of Good and Evil, between an oppressed people and its wicked government. Earlier, I have called the movement a total event. Such an event does not only express within its own frame

events occurring in society are also coloured by and even sub-jected to its moral and cognitive order. The way the various tertiary discourses of contemporary Chinese society have been contextualized, decontextualized, and recontextualized during the People's Movement provides unique insights into Chinese culture and society, because it functioned as a magnifying glass for many crucial elements. Many of the moral consequences of reform were highlighted by the People's Movement. Without the movement I would have been unable to make the analysis presented in Part II. Conversely, I have been able to understand the unfolding event of the People's Movement much more clearly because I had already acquired during my interviews and observations an increasing understanding of the way Beijing's citizens led their lives, and of the dilemmas they faced.

It must be stressed that this analysis tries to be more than just my personal interpretation of the events which constituted the People's Movement. I have drawn both on my fieldwork carried out before 15 April, on the interviews and conversations with citizens conducted during the movement, and on my own observations of the events themselves. Together they have enabled me, to a certain extent at least, to reconstruct the primary, secondary and tertiary discourses guiding the actions of the Beijingers during the six weeks the movement lasted. What follows is therefore the picture of the People's Movement from the actors' points of view, as far as I am able to give it.

Although the analysis which follows has not been written for China specialists only, it does assume some general knowledge of the People's Movement. For the benefit of readers who are not familiar with the main events I will first summarize the development of the movement in Beijing. As a further aid one may consult the chronology of events in the appendix.

The People's Movement was sparked off by the death of Hu Yaobang, a disgraced reform-oriented party leader, on 15 April 1989. Students from various universities in Beijing, such as Beijing University, Chinese People's University and Beijing Normal University, staged protests at the central Tian'anmen Square during which they used their mourning over Hu's death to make political demands.

The student movement escalated after the *People's Daily*, the official Communist Party newspaper, published a strong-worded

student marches on 27 April and 4 May ensued which, for the first time, were openly supported by Beijing citizens who watched along the way. Equally important, the students received support from Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang who had been away on an official visit to North Korea at the time of the *People's Daily* condemnation of the movement. The increased scale of the demonstrations, the support by ordinary citizens, and the open split within the party leadership were enough to force the government into trying to negotiate with the students.

These secret negotiations, however, did not produce any quick results. In response, about 2,000 students decided to go on hunger-strike in Tian'anmen Square. Their only demands were that the government agree to a public and equal dialogue with the students, and acknowledge that the student movement was patriotic. The government, however, was unwilling to do either. The suffering of the hunger-strikers and the government's harsh attitude unleashed the long-felt sympathy of Beijing's citizens for the students' cause. Mass demonstrations in support of the hunger-strikers followed; first by Beijing's intellectuals on 15 May and then by delegations from work units on 17 and 18 May.

Alarmed by the escalation of the events, a coalition of moderate and conservative party and state leaders, put together by Deng Xiaoping, brushed aside Zhao Ziyang's opposition and declared martial law in the Beijing area. However, attempts on 20 and 21 May to enter Beijing with local troops failed because the people of Beijing blocked the entrances to the city and the troops refused to open fire. The failure of the use of local troops to crush the movement forced the party and state leadership to change course. There followed negotiations with army leaders from other provinces to persuade them to deploy their troops or at least remain neutral while other armies marched on Beijing.

It took the leadership two weeks to solve the political and logistical problems which the new strategy entailed. At ten o'clock in the evening of 3 June the army again marched on Beijing. At the cost of many casualties columns of tanks and armed personal carriers broke through the road blocks which were manned by students and citizens, reaching Tian'anmen Square at two o'clock in the morning on 4 June. After sealing off the Square, at five o'clock the army allowed the remaining

students in the square to leave. Beijing had been captured and the People's Movement had been broken, but the writing of the movement's history had barely begun.

2. THE DEATH OF HU YAOBANG

On 15 April 1989 Hu Yaobang, the former Party Secretary who had been stripped of this post in 1987 because he had been too soft on the student demonstrations in 1986,³ died of a heart attack suffered during a Politburo meeting a week earlier. To progressive students at the universities in Beijing this presented an unexpected opportunity to carry out the protest demonstrations which they had been considering for some time (Nick 1989: 60; Shen 1990: Chaps 6 and 7). Through strategic mistakes, past waves of student political activity (1980, 1985, 1986, 1988) had led to nothing. This was the opportunity to apply the two strategic lessons they had learned from these experiences.

The first one was to avoid an immediate government crackdown before the movement had had time to get the sympathy and support of the population. The students had to avoid criticizing the political system, and especially the leading role of the Communist Party. If they failed to do this the party leadership might unite against them, label their movement counterrevolutionary, and crush it before it could gather political momentum. Even more seriously, this would also alienate the majority of the population, who were still loyal to the party and the political system it had built.

In addition, the students should show themselves to be above the day-to-day factional struggle within the communist party, and more specifically avoid being identified with the radical reform-oriented faction led by Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang. The way Deng Xiaoping had used the 1978-9 Democracy Wall Movement had already shown how such movements could be of great political value in the intra-party struggles for those who knew how to use them.⁴ If the student movement was connected openly with radical reform-oriented leaders, conservative leaders might perceive the students as an immediate threat, and use their power to crush the student movement before the reform-oriented leaders had had time to use the students to their own political advantage.

Just as important, identification with the reformers would

destroy the most important long-term political capital of the students. The students derived their strength from their role as the nation's conscience. They had to show themselves to be selfless petitioners, who risked their positions and maybe even their lives solely for the common good. If the students came to be thought of as an arm of the reformers, they would never again be able to speak on behalf of 'the people' to the whole party leadership. In short, the students had to make use of the divisions within the party without, however, somehow getting embroiled in them.

The second strategic problem facing the students was how to mobilize the mass of the urban population so that they could apply the greatest possible pressure on the authorities. The students knew they would be sowing on fertile soil, thanks to the mounting dissatisfaction with the results of the urban reforms (corruption, inflation, decreased job security, growing income inequality) and the moral crisis threatening the legitimacy of the political system.

The most powerful discursive resource of the students was China's tradition of protest. To use this, their role as petitioners and independent, altruistic representatives of 'the people' had to be carefully played. They had to avoid the mistakes of the earlier student demonstrations in the 1980s, which had demanded improvement of the material conditions of student life. Other concrete complaints, shared with the majority of the (urban) population (mounting inflation, dismantling of the 'iron food bowl') would also resemble straightforward self-interest promotion too much, something which has little legitimacy in the Chinese tradition of protest. On the other hand, slogans about democracy and freedom alone, although non-partisan and representing the common good, would by themselves mean very little to most Chinese, and would be insufficient to arouse their enthusiasm.

As I have shown in Chapter 5, the tradition of protest and the official orthodoxy are intertwined. This is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, protest becomes very difficult to suppress legitimately, because it is phrased in terms of the official ideology, while, on the other hand, the hegemonic role of the official ideology makes it hard for protest to develop beyond petitioning. Before protesters arrive at the point where they can challenge the political system itself, their movement has to go

through a long process of development of its primary knowledge, morality and power. This also makes it very difficult to mobilize large numbers of people for the movement. For a long time during the People's Movement, many people refrained from actively joining in. Mass demonstrations of ordinary citizens would push the movement immediately beyond the limits of what the party and state leadership was prepared to tolerate, and would invite a government crackdown. The following quote from an interview with two informants, husband and wife who are both workers in a state factory, conducted on the day the hunger-strike started, shows that many people in Beijing knew what the dangers of active participation were:

Q: What I don't understand is that the people do not participate in this movement.

Deng: (fast) Supporting but not participating!

Shen: This, how shall we put this, historical movements are always like this. The students . . . are the activists of historical movements. Why is it that students seem to mobilize the workers, mobilize the peasants? [They are] uniting people. [They are] forging an alliance.

Deng: The masses and the students.

Shen: If it is only the students who are doing something it won't amount to a whole lot. But suppose that we workers stand up as well, that will be a lot more serious. (Tape 29: 4)

Before the hunger-strike there were still no immediate and compelling moral reasons to confront rather than to petition the government. At this time, Deng, Shen and I had not yet realized that the hunger-strike would do exactly what Shen implicitly warned of: give the people of Beijing a compelling moral reason to enter the movement actively.

In the eyes of a large majority of the people, protest was legitimate only as long as its objective was to correct, and not to overthrow the government. Accordingly, the two informants who I have cited above presented the passivity of the ordinary people as a strategic move, or a stage in a process which the student movement tried to initiate. Moreover, the speed and formulaic intonation with which Deng typifies the content of my question indicated that to her this strategy was standard and commonly understood; it was a shared discursive knowledge which was applied to the specific circumstances of this

movement. Shen added to this that, if the workers were to participate, things would indeed become more serious. After all, student demonstrations, if not accepted forms of political action, were at least not thought of as a serious threat to the government.⁵ This shows that people like Deng and Shen knew that their participation would be interpreted as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the government. They therefore had to think twice before using this final weapon.

The problem of mass mobilization was given extra currency because of the socio-political structure of the People's Republic and the nature of political control which came with it. In this context it was almost impossible for the common man to side openly with the students, let alone organize their own demonstrations. Demonstrating in China is more than just a normal form of political action. It means that one risks most, if not everything one is and has. In the eyes of the authorities it constitutes a direct challenge to the system and the leadership of the Party itself. It is potentially counterrevolutionary behaviour and not an accepted way to express one's own interests. Most people I spoke to reasoned, rightly or wrongly, that the students could risk demonstrating, because they were still young and had no family to worry about. My interviewees said that they themselves, however, could not afford to lose their jobs and burden their families with a political stigma.

Mobilization was especially problematic because of the dominant role the work unit, and with it the party, played in people's daily lives. Since its victory in 1949, the party had taken great pains to prevent other organizations from emerging which were not directly or indirectly subordinate to its own bureaucratic supervision. Therefore it was only natural that if my informants were to demonstrate they would do so with their work units. In urban China there does not yet exist an alternative organizational focus beyond the work unit where social activities, including demonstrations, can be set up. This gives the Party an unprecedented hold over the lives of the people, provided, of course, that it maintains its control over the bureaucratized social structure itself. Demonstrations or other forms of political action would need the permission or at least the tacit approval of the unit leader. That these more widely joined demonstrations eventually happened is one of the major breakthroughs forced by the movement. This was only made possible because of

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very special circumstances: the political deadlock within the leadership, the mounting dissatisfaction among the people, the level of political sophistication of the students, and a discursive learning process which took place during the movement itself.

Initially, however, the students could not hope for the active participation of the people. During the first stages, the challenge was to create avenues for the people to express their sympathy without becoming tainted politically. When the students at the campuses in Beijing heard about Hu Yaobang's death, they understood immediately that this could be such an avenue, because the 1976 April Fifth Movement provided them with a blue-print. The way they used Hu as a symbol was directly copied from the incident 13 years earlier.

Moreover, comparison with the April Fifth Movement in itself was already a strong symbol working in favour of the students. It acted as a contextualization cue both for the tradition of protest and for official communist ideology, because in both moral systems the incident occupied a central place. Criticizing the leadership under the guise of mourning a deceased leader was not the only repetition of and reference to 1976. The importance of the movement as a cue is also borne out by many pamphlets and wall-posters written by students or their sympathizers. One especially telling example, dated 1 May 1989, has been translated in Mok & Harrison (1990: 54-55) under the title 'Our "April Student Movement" and the "April Fifth Movement"'. It tries to prove the current government's moral bankruptcy by comparing its appraisal of the movement with the condemnation of the 1976 incident by the radical leftist government of the time. This strikes directly at the heart of the leadership's claim to legitimacy, which is based on its opposition to the 'Gang of Four' and its reappraisal of the Gang's condemnation of the 1976 incident.⁶

The day after Hu's demise students from several universities in Beijing went to Tian'anmen Square to mourn over his death at the Monument of Revolutionary Heroes, to exchange ideas and experiences, and to coordinate their activities with those of other students. That day Wu'er Kaixi, a student at Beijing Normal University, gave his first speech, displaying the oratorical talents which would make him one of the most important leaders – and definitely the most famous – of the student move-

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ment (Nick 1989: 60-61). During the days that followed students continued to gather at the monument, attracting increasing numbers of curious bystanders.

My own first confrontation with the student movement on 18 April I have already described in Chapter 1. That evening several thousand students had come together at the monument and at the entrance to the Great Hall of the People⁷ at the western edge of the square. The students at the Hall were sitting down on the pavement discussing a set of demands they intended to present to delegates meeting inside.⁸ After the students had agreed on their demands, they sent a delegation into the hall to present them to the delegates there.

Several versions exist of the demands formulated by the students during this stage of the movement. Apparently, the students were still organizing their movement and did not yet have an unequivocal leadership structure to coordinate their activities. In most accounts though the demands are similar, so here I will only give them as I took them down from one of the students at the Hall:

- Clarification of the reasons for Hu Yaobang's dismissal in 1987;
- Clarification of the reasons and background of the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign which was launched after Hu's dismissal;
- Publication of high cadres' incomes;
- Withdrawal of the regulations restricting student demonstrations in Beijing;
- Allowing the publication of non-official (*minban*) publications;
- That the delegates in the Hall come outside to talk with the students about these demands;
- That the *People's Daily* print a truthful account of what has happened here this evening.

The combination of mourning and protest, and the obvious resemblance of this to the earlier Tian'anmen incident, provided the student movement with a temporary legitimacy. It proved to be an effective aid with which to navigate around the rocks of quick government suppression, buying precious time for the students to build up their own organizations and think about their strategy. At the same time, mourning Hu Yaobang gave

the people of Beijing the time and the opportunity to observe the activities of the students, and see with their own eyes that they were not spoiled youngsters, or worse, political fanatics bent on starting a second cultural revolution. The students showed themselves to be disciplined patriots in the tradition of the Tian'anmen incident and the May Fourth movement, who expressed the people's sadness about Hu's death, and only wanted to open a dialogue with the government about what they and the people knew was wrong with Chinese society.

In retrospect, the movement's first phase displayed almost all the elements which would return much more clearly later on. The students' strategy was to build up their own, independent organizations. They would provide leadership and continuity for a prolonged movement, gradually forcing ever more concessions from the authorities in the direction of a more open political system. To this aim it was necessary to force the authorities to enter into a dialogue, and to be recognized by them as patriotic and loyal to the party. This made it vital to cultivate carefully the student movement's image of selflessness, moderation, and discipline, and to avoid violence at all costs, but at the same time wrest from the authorities concessions which would involve more than just redressing injustices.

This was borne out, for instance, by the demands of the students (see above). They entailed anything but a radical overhaul of the political system. Yet the theme of mourning Hu Yaobang was used to pose a number of questions and make several demands, which, in the long run, could have far-reaching consequences. Many of these demands would resurface later on during the movement, albeit more explicitly formulated.

The demands for clarification concerning Hu's dismissal and the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign challenged the right to rule of those top leaders who held their current positions because they had used Hu as a scapegoat for the 1986 student demonstrations. Although these demands did not question the vanguard role of the party, they can be read as the direct precursors of the subsequent demands for the resignation or, later still, the downfall, of Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, and Yang Shangkun. Similarly, the demand for the disclosure of officials' incomes raises the issue of official corruption, a prominent theme throughout the movement. Lastly, the demands for the withdrawal of the regulations restricting demonstrations, and for the

truthful reporting by the People's Daily raise the issues of freedom of political activity and freedom of the press. Because of the way they were put, superficially at least, they did not touch on anything beyond the right to petition the government. However, in actual fact this would be no less than a direct challenge of the party's monopoly of power and truth. These freedoms would supply the legal basis for the growth of independent student organizations and an independent press.

As the student movement unfolded, the people of Beijing became more and more convinced that the students were demonstrating and petitioning the government on their behalf. Just as importantly, they also learned that their presence as bystanders gave extra weight to the activities of the students. As bystanders, large numbers of people were able to show passively and indirectly their sympathy for the students without having to participate actively in the demonstrations.

This meant that public relations became a priority for the students. From the very beginning the written word played a central role in the movement. Pamphlets, wall-posters, and later unofficial periodicals were produced in great quantity, and were reproduced using mimeograph machines and photocopiers.⁹

Even more important were the media. Truthful reporting in the domestic and foreign media would provide the students with an audience much larger than could be reached by demonstrations, petitions and pamphlets alone. Therefore, from the outset freedom of the press was of prime importance to the students, as was made clear for instance by their insistence that negotiations between student and government representatives be broadcast on television live and uncensored.¹⁰ Throughout the movement the foreign media – above all the Chinese bulletins of the BBC World Service and the Voice of America – helped to spread the news about the demonstrations all over Beijing and China. Between Zhao's reappraisal on 3 May and the declaration of martial law on 20 May, the Chinese media were also extremely frank in their reporting. After martial law was declared their role was taken over by the Hong Kong press. Clippings from Hong Kong Chinese newspapers were photocopied (or transcribed and mimeographed) and posted all over Beijing. However, the students' own propaganda activities and the reporting done by the Chinese and foreign media were also important for reasons other than mobilization and coordi-

nation of local political actors. First, the media also mobilized international public opinion. During the final weeks Beijing was flooded with journalists and China specialists, making the People's Movement an international media event of the first magnitude. The Chinese leaders knew that their treatment of the movement was being very closely watched by millions all over the world. Any mistakes or excessively harsh actions could damage China's international reputation for years to come.

Second, the propaganda of the students and the reporting by the media created an immediate historical record of the movement. By producing texts from the contextualized actions making up the movement an effort was made to determine the historiography of the movement and its significance for future events. In other words, the production of a written (or on videotape, audiotape, or recorded as a computer file¹²) record was a device to decontextualize the primary knowledge, morality, and power relations which were created during the movement. While constructing the movement, students and other participants were keenly aware that the real impact of the movement would only be felt after it had subsided or been suppressed. The movement had to be incorporated into the tradition of protest and become a weapon in the hands of future movements.

I will come back to this point in the concluding section of this chapter. At this juncture, I will only illustrate the significance of the movement's decontextualization with one common activity. One of the most ubiquitous phenomena during the movement was that just about everybody was constantly busy making audio or even video recordings of speeches, demonstrations, and slogans, while poems,¹² pamphlets and wall-posters were copied down by hand, photographed, videotaped, or read out into a portable cassette recorder.¹³ Similarly, students who tried to hand out pamphlets had them frequently torn out of their hands by an eager crowd, and people who had got hold of a copy often had to fight off the others.

Mourning Hu Yaobang thus provided the students with a way to appropriate the tradition of protest, and thereby helped to solve the problem of mobilization. It was also a way around the second strategic dilemma student movements in China had to face: avoiding identification with the faction of pragmatic reformers led by Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang, and remaining

politically neutral enough to forestall immediate repression by a leadership closing ranks in the face of a common threat.

Despite the efforts of the students to keep up the appearance of mourning, Deng Xiaoping and most of the more conservative leaders were disturbed by events. Initially, the authorities were content to portray the students as loyal, slightly rash youngsters who only wanted to express their understandable grief over the loss of a prominent national leader.

In the early morning of 20 April, however, a first indication was given that the patience of the authorities had become exhausted. A demonstration in front of the Xinhua Gate, the entrance to the residences and offices of China's highest and mightiest, was violently dispersed by the police. According to official sources this happened after some of the students had started to throw bottles.¹⁴ This could be presented as an unfortunate incident, but it strengthened the students resolve in their sense of mission and martyrdom, culminating in their hunger-strike three weeks later (Shen 1991: 173–184).

The authorities only became seriously worried a few days later. On 22 April, during the official memorial meeting for Hu Yaobang held at the Great Hall of the People, thousands of students assembled at Tian'anmen Square for their own, demonstrative memorial rally. Going down on their knees in traditional fashion, three students even presented a petition to the leaders who were assembled in the hall. This made it clear that the pretence could no longer be upheld that the students were only mourning Hu. The official memorial meeting was intended as a display of official grief for Hu. Yet by organizing their own rally, the students demonstrated openly that to them this was unsatisfactory.

The authorities increasingly felt they were being pushed into a corner. On 26 April an editorial was published in the *People's Daily*. After having declared the establishment of autonomous student unions an illegal act, the editorial stated that a very small number of people were trying to create chaos, using as a cover their fellow-students' grief over Hu's death and their wish for a better socialist democracy. This, the editorial continued, amounted to a premeditated conspiracy and an attempt at rebellion with the aim of undermining the leading role of the communist party and socialism (*Renmin ribao* 1989b). Undermining the leading role of the party is the worst possible political

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offence. The use of this phrase serves as a cue for the right and the intention of the party to crack down on such conspirators, i.e. forcibly to end the student movement which had provided these people with the opportunity to carry out their counterrevolutionary plans.

In all likelihood, the conservative leaders had carefully timed this to coincide with the absence of Zhao Ziyang, who had departed to North Korea for an official visit on 23 April. The editorial proved to be the decisive mistake. It ruled out negotiations with the students just at the moment that their movement had lost much of the initial impetus which had been built up by mourning Hu's death. This theme had lost most of its force, and the students were at a loss as to what to demonstrate about next. Their problem was to keep the movement going until the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth movement, which was of great symbolic value to a movement built upon a tradition of protest in which the May Fourth movement played such a pivotal role.

Until the publication of the editorial in the *People's Daily*, the authorities could probably have avoided a further escalation by entering into negotiations with the students. During these negotiations the authorities could have satisfied the students by making some limited concessions, such as recognizing the Autonomous Student Union of Beijing Universities (*Beijing shi gaoxiao xuesheng zizhi lianhui*, or *Beigaolian*), provisionally founded on 20 April, and legalizing independent publications of the students. To the people of Beijing this would have shown that the authorities had taken 'the voice of the people' seriously, and more demonstrations would therefore not be necessary. Nevertheless, such concessions would have constituted an important victory for the students. They would have given them the opportunity to retreat to the campuses to strengthen their own organizations, building up their independence from the bureaucratized social structure dominated by the communist party.

Yet in the context of the People's Movement the arrogant and uncompromising tone of the editorial gave the students just what they needed to justify the continuation their demonstrations. Apparently, the conservative party leaders were convinced that limited concessions would, in the long run, only set a precedent for farther-reaching concessions in the future. To

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them, dialogue and compromise meant no less than the demise of the Leninist order, which they had built up themselves and which they saw as the only guarantee that the party could fulfil its revolutionary mission.

3. THE ROLE OF THE BYSTANDERS

The 26 April editorial proved that the students had been able to solve successfully the second strategic problem: staying clear of the intra-party factional struggle. At the same time it also helped them to find a more solid solution for the first one: how to forge a more active link between their movement and the dissatisfied mass of the Beijing people. On 27 April the students organized a demonstration to protest against the editorial of the previous day.¹⁵ This march was not only much larger than the earlier ones, but, more importantly, the bystanders along its route for the first time clearly expressed their support for the students. People gave money, ice-cream, food and drink to the students, which added new elements to the repertoire of the movement. These would occur again during the period of the hunger-strike and the occupation of the square as a symbolic expression and renewal of the tie between the students and the people of Beijing. By supporting the students, the bystanders made it clear that they did not agree with the assessment of the student movement in the *People's Daily's* editorial. The students expressed the people's dissatisfaction with the current leadership and a dialogue between them and the authorities should therefore be permitted.

During the demonstration of 27 April, the movement showed for the first time that it could become a true People's Movement. The 26 April editorial had polarized Chinese society, and had shown to the common man that the authorities were unwilling to listen to the voice of the people, the students. The experiences of the weeks before 27 April had taught the people of Beijing and the students that the role of bystander could be a potentially powerful tool for political action. Support from the bystanders could give the student demonstrations the political impact the students could never have on their own.

Just as importantly, the anonymity and outward passivity of the bystander role gave the people a way of circumventing the Chinese system of political control which focuses on people as

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members of work units and not as individual citizens. Bystanders, however, are not part of the bureaucratized social structure, and therefore cannot be controlled by it. Through the control system, the party had achieved a degree of supervision which made it unnecessary to develop the instruments to monitor and control political activities outside this. The system was beaten exactly because of its unprecedented success at dominating the whole fabric of organized Chinese society.

Consequently, the most important function of the continuing demonstrations was to show the movement's success at popular mobilization. The specific demands and slogans of the day were in a sense less important. The crucial political fact was that a demonstration supported by the people took place at all. The demonstrations surrounded by tens of thousands of people expressed and renewed the mandate of the students to speak on behalf of the people. The demonstrations and their bystanders emancipated the concept of 'the people' (*renmin*, *laobixing*) from official discourse. Instead of an empty propaganda slogan, it became an real and autonomous political actor.

Still, this new political actor had only a very limited vocabulary at its disposal. The support, applause and donations represented a whole range of often contradictory complaints about the current situation. The same held for the students. Their demands had to be supported by the large majority of the people. The demands either had to be so general that they were virtually devoid of any real meaning like the demands for 'democracy' and 'freedom', or had to be extremely specific like the ones made on 18 April and the slogans calling for the downfall of corrupt officials (*dadao guanliao*). These demands were heard all through the movement, and provided it with the necessary continuity even during relative lulls in its development. Their function was to provide a framework to which, depending on the events of the day, different concrete demands could be attached.

Because the demands of the students, both the extremely general and the extremely specific ones, had no direct bearing on the concrete interests and frustrations of individual segments of the population, everybody could identify with the movement. Every individual, acting as an anonymous member of 'the people', could give the students the mandate to represent his or her specific but unstated frustrations about the leadership

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and its policies. For instance, when I asked a bicycle repairman whether his business had already been contracted out to him, he volunteered the following opinion:

My business has been contracted out (*chengbao*) to me for a while now, or actually it has been only partially contracted out. Now it is me who is running the financial risks, but the decisions are still made by the cadres of the organization to which my business belongs. They aren't doing a thing, but nevertheless hang on to their positions, and that is the reason the people are demonstrating now. (Fieldnotes, May 1989)

When asked about his opinion on the student demonstrations, Shen, an interview informant quoted on several occasions already, formulated in the following way the moral contradictions in contemporary Chinese society, and the way the student demonstration mobilized and expressed these:

I am very concerned, concerned about that movement, concerned about the disturbances, and even more concerned about the reputation of our country. [About] whether this student disturbance is good or not, I think that still it is good. Although they have created some disturbances, and have made things difficult, at least they have attacked corrupt elements, and especially those within the party. They have sounded the alarm bell about them. They are also [in] the Communist Party, which is the leading party, and [the students] have exposed them. Why is it that the students are talking like that? It is because they at least have a solid social basis. No matter what the students want, the workers and the peasants ...

Q: But, apart from the problem of corruption, the students have also raised more abstract issues like freedom and democracy.

A: These things ... I nevertheless think they are necessary. They are indispensable in the people's lives. The least you need is freedom and democracy. These must be safeguarded. ... All those manifestations of corruption, you can see them everywhere. Isn't that so? (Tape 29: 3-4)

In line with the observations about the nature of social protest in Chapter 5, Shen starts his analysis by establishing a moral,

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disinterested frame of reference. The movement is presented as important, because it relates to the state the country is in, and not because of, for instance, the rising prices or the dismantling of the iron food bowl, issues about which he had expressed his concern earlier on during the interview. He then goes on to talk about corrupt elements, and not about corruption as a feature of the entire system. The task of the movement is to expose these elements and thus to reestablish the credibility of the system. On the other hand, my explicit question about democracy and freedom does not inspire him a great deal. He realizes that they figure prominently in the movement's moral and cognitive frames of reference, but all he does is relate them back immediately to the issue of corruption. Freedom and democracy emerge not as ideals, but as umbrella slogans or at best abstract concepts which somehow will be able to rejuvenate the moral righteousness of the system.

The fact that people's real complaints could not be expressed more explicitly at this stage gave the movement its unity and force. Even more importantly, for the authorities it kept the movement (just) within the bounds of the acceptable, both in terms of its ideological content (petitioning only), and its mode of remonstration (support but no active participation). The demands and slogans of the students therefore had a mainly symbolical relevance. To most bystanders they did not mean anything more (but also nothing less) than that there was something very wrong with the current policies, and that the government had to listen to the grievances of the people.

The People's Movement conformed to the pattern of a traditional Chinese petitioning movement, in which concrete sectional or individual interests were not allowed to play a role. Only the common interest, the interest of the people counted, with the students assuming the traditional role of the honest and altruistic imperial degree holder. The demonstrations, the slogans for democracy and freedom, and against corruption, plus the support of the bystanders were the manifestation of (re)invented primary knowledge, morality and power, which were developed during this particular event on the basis of a well-established tertiary ideology.

Meanwhile, the authorities made matters even worse for themselves. In reaction to the 27 April demonstration the concession was made to meet with student representatives on 29

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April, a meeting which would be broadcast live on television.¹⁶ The authorities refused, however, to meet with the Autonomous Student Union of Beijing Universities, and only representatives of the official student unions were accepted as participants.¹⁷ Throughout the meeting, and later at a press conference, the spokesman of the State Council, Yuan Mu, further alienated the student activists. His arrogance and paternalistic jokes confirmed their belief that this government was not seriously interested in doing business with the students.

Large-scale demonstrations supported by the people were a newly discovered political weapon which gave the student movement the impetus to carry itself over to the symbolic date of 4 May, the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement. However, the demonstration which the students had organized for that day lacked a new theme, and was only a re-enactment of the 27 April demonstration. The students had had to face the same problems as they had to before the 27 April demonstration. Which is the next symbolic date we have to work towards? In what way can we keep the movement alive and the initiative in our own hands? Meanwhile, two related but independent developments had caught up with the students' activities, which, while solving these problems, at the same time radically altered the nature of the movement.

4. JOURNALISTS AND BICYCLE DEMONSTRATIONS

While the students were refining the art of demonstrating, progressive intellectuals and journalists were testing the limits of the new political situation by starting a campaign for more press freedom. The issue at the centre of this was the closure of the semi-independent, Shanghai-based, *World Economic Herald* (*Shijie jingji daobao*) by the local party secretary, Jiang Zemin – who was later to become Zhao Ziyang's successor as national party secretary – because it had published a controversial article about Hu Yaobang on 24 April (Faison 1990: 151–155; Wright 1990).

On 4 May a demonstration took place of Beijing journalists who joined the much larger student demonstration of that day. At the time it was hardly noticed, but the students and journalists were quick to coordinate their subsequent activities. For the first (and last) time during the People's Movement, an interest group had grasped the opportunity offered by the student dem-

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onstrations to start demonstrating themselves for their own set of demands. Passive bystanders had become active participants. However, the new and open alliance between the students and the journalists created an important precedent for the later demonstrations 'to support the hunger-strikers'.

The main reason why it was possible for the journalists to start demonstrating to further their own interests was that press freedom was already an important general theme of the movement.¹⁸

Today I went to the institute. There I ran into a colleague, who told me about the latest developments. The issue has shifted to freedom, freedom of the press. He told me that this is a step forward compared to the May Fourth Movement of 1919 [sic!]. The slogans then were democracy and science, but democracy without freedom is empty. The authorities, too, can agree on the need for democracy. (Fieldnotes, 10 May 1989: 1)

Even so, the journalists were acutely aware of the somewhat problematic character of their move, and therefore were quick to contextualize their demand for general press freedom by demanding the right to report truthfully about the movement. On 9 May more than 1,000 journalists and editors participated in new demonstrations, and presented a petition to the authorities demanding more press freedom. The following day, the students in turn organized their own demonstrations in support of the journalists. They demanded press freedom and mocked the media's dependence on the party by means of slogans like 'The People's Daily: bullshit!' (*Renmin ribao: hu shuo ba dao!*).

During these demonstrations the students for the first time wore headbands and sashes with slogans or the name of their university written on them. This they had copied from televised Korean and Japanese student demonstrations, and during the hunger-strike and the period of martial law it became the most important symbol of activist status. New, too, was the frequent use of slogans written in English. Earlier on during the movement flashing a 'V' for victory with one's fingers, copied from the 1986 movement in the Philippines, had already been introduced. All these additions to the repertoire attest to the fact that the creation of an international audience on top of their existing

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audiences (the authorities, the Chinese people) had become even more important than at first.

Just before the declaration of martial law on 20 May yet another prop would be added to the students' repertoire. When rumours started to spread that the authorities were transporting tear-gas to Beijing to use against the students, the latter started wearing white cotton face masks, which are normally used as protection against Beijing's fierce dust storms. Together with the headbands and sashes, they came to stand for the martyrdom the hunger-striking students were seeking. After some time however the face-mask disappeared again when it became clear that the tear-gas, if it had ever existed at all, would not be used.

Another, less happy addition to the movement's repertoire of protest was that the student demonstration of 10 May in support of the journalists took place by bike. The reason for this appears to have been purely practical. The destination of this demonstration was no longer Tian'anmen Square in the centre of Beijing, but the compound of the *People's Daily* in the eastern suburbs. Given the fact that Beijing's universities were located in the northwestern part of the city it would have taken the whole day to get there and return. Unfortunately, the bicycle demonstration was less than successful. A large crowd of people traveling by bike is much more difficult to control than the same number of people on foot. Moreover, the bystanders hardly got the opportunity to cheer at the cyclists zipping by, or give them food or drink. Demonstrating by bike threatened the two most important primary discursive assets the students had so expertly built up. The first of these, namely the demonstrative support from the bystanders, has been discussed already. The second was the discipline and orderliness of the demonstrations, serving as contextualization cues for the students' patriotism and loyalty to the system. In other words, by not creating chaos physically during the demonstrations, the students showed that they were also not out to create chaos politically, something which is, as we have seen in Chapter 5, of crucial importance in Chinese cultural assumptions about the nature of politics (see also Shen 1991: 174, 182).

The second development, changing permanently the nature of the unfolding movement, was Zhao Ziyang's return from Korea on 1 May. Before his departure, Zhao had avoided stating his opinion about the student movement, but on 3 May and

especially on 4 May he presented an assessment clearly at odds with the official standpoint as formulated in the 26 April editorial.¹⁹ According to Zhao, the students were not organizing a conspiracy against the state, adding that their reasonable demands should be met through democratic and legal channels. Especially disturbing to the conservative majority in the leadership was that Zhao had refused to insert in his 3 May speech the phrase 'Oppose bourgeois liberalization'. This would have served as a contextualization cue for the party's unity against what in the 26 April editorial had been defined as the class enemy, i.e. the small number of rebellious elements amongst the student activists.²⁰

Zhao's standpoint made clear that an irreparable rift had occurred within the leadership which could only end with the defeat of one of the two factions. From then on, the fate of Zhao and the fate of the movement were closely connected. Apparently, Zhao had decided that the movement was a good bet on which to improve his own position in the leadership. This meant that he had to find ways to stimulate, direct and, where necessary, slow down the movement. However, for the students this meant that the slumbering problem of becoming co-opted into the factional struggle had suddenly become acute.

The first result of Zhao's encouraging words was that the general mood during the demonstration on 4 May could be relaxed and at times even festive. Nevertheless, this demonstration also showed that student demonstrations which were supported by the population but had no clear political agenda had reached the limit of their political efficacy. It was therefore not surprising that the next upswing of the movement was, as we have seen, the initiative of another group, namely journalists, with the students relegated temporarily to a supporting role.

There is no conclusive evidence that the demonstrations of journalists on 4 and 9 May were approved by Zhao; only clues exist. I will discuss the organization of the demonstrations and the role of the bureaucracy at greater length below, and will give only one example here. One news dispatch about the 4 May demonstration contains the following remark:

A large number of responsible persons of news organizations in Beijing have expressed their understanding and support for journalists and editors of their news organiza-

tions, who have participated in the demonstration and have collected signatures for a petition for press freedom. The responsible person of no news organization has dissuaded his subordinates or has stopped their activities (Wu *et al.* 1989, Vol. 1: 132-133).

The question immediately coming to mind is from where these responsible persons got the bureaucratic support for such an unprecedented step.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Zhao and the students did not develop smoothly, although the latter had established a Dialogue Delegation (*dialhua daibiaoquan*), largely made up of older and more moderate students (Luo *et al.* 1990: 35; Shen 1991: 215-219). The task of the delegation was to enter into negotiations with representatives of the authorities, mainly moderate leaders, such as the head of the Communist Party's United Front Department Yan Mingfu, who were sympathetic to Zhao Ziyang. The negotiations were intended to prepare the way for a public dialogue between the students and the authorities. The crucial problem, however, proved to be the students' insistence on an equal dialogue between them and the authorities being broadcast live on national television. For Zhao a successful dialogue was important because it would prove correct his insistence on 3 and 4 May that the students were reasonable and should be listened to. Precisely for this reason the conservatives' interests would be served best if the talks were a failure.²¹ The students in turn had to watch out not to sell themselves too cheaply. If so, they could again lose their hard-won mandate of the people. Even worse, it would strengthen the suspicion that they were only tools of Zhao Ziyang, and they would lose one of their most potent primary moral resources, namely their independence from the intra-party power struggle, which they had built up so carefully.²²

These conflicting forces and interests proved to be too difficult for Zhao and the students to sort out quickly. Despite closed meetings between student leaders of the Dialogue Delegation and members of the Zhao-faction, mediated by some prominent intellectuals, they could not reach a compromise about a public dialogue (Nick 1989: 64-65; Shen 1991: 249-251). While these closed meetings were still under way, however, the developments at Tian'anmen Square had already overtaken them.

5. THE HUNGER-STRIKE

Although the participation of the journalists had given the movement the new impetus it needed to keep going until Gorbachev's visit on 15 May, which by now had been singled out as the next target date, the situation for most of Beijing's citizens remained very much the same. More important than the demonstrations of journalists and students, therefore, was the hunger-strike at Tian'anmen Square, which was started on 13 May by about 2,000 students.

Although up to now not all the details about the decision to start a hunger-strike are clear, we do know that it went against the wish of many student leaders who dominated the Autonomous Students Union of Beijing Universities and the Dialogue Delegation.²³ A central role in the hunger-strike was played by students who, for one reason or another, had been unable to occupy centre-stage during the earlier phases of the movement, and therefore had been excluded from the ranks of powerful student leaders. As yet though, the movement was by no means routinized and bureaucratized, and presented ample opportunities for ambitious individuals to challenge those in power.

In all likelihood, the student movement's retreat into a supporting role, and the secret negotiations going on between the student leaders and members of Zhao's faction, had led to increased restlessness among the rank-and-file. In this context, a new group of students could make a bid for power. The undisputed leader of this new group became Chai Ling, a Beijing Normal University student who delivered a now-famous speech at the Beijing University campus on 11 May. Her speech, recorded and quickly distributed all over Beijing, touched the impatience of the students there and elsewhere in Beijing and galvanized them into action (Li Lu 1990: 131-133; Shen 1991: 237). Chai's call for a hunger-strike had all the elements of dramatized martyrdom and the courage which the established leaders seemed to be losing.

Such was the impact of Chai's speech that many of the leaders who were organized in the Autonomous Students Union of Beijing Universities, such as Wang Dan and Wu'er Kaixi, had no choice but to participate in the hunger-strike as well, if they did not want to lose their credibility completely. The hunger-strikers acquired great moral authority which gave them

absolute say over the whole movement. The hunger-strikers' association, the Command Post of the Hunger-Strike Group (*Jueshituan zhinibubu*), eclipsed the Autonomous Students Union of Beijing Universities as the leading organization of the movement. The emergence of a new group of leaders, the rejuvenation of the movement's populism and the radicalization of its strategy were the result (Shen 1991: 243, 272, 275-276).

At first sight, though, the demands of the hunger-strikers seemed to be eminently reasonable and moderate. They demanded, first, that the authorities enter into an equal dialogue with them. Second, the authorities should recognize that the student movement was both patriotic and democratic.²⁴ Nevertheless, with one blow, the hunger-strike sealed the fate of Zhao's attempts to use the movement for his own purposes. The essence of the political message of the hunger-strikers was not in their demands but in the fact of the hunger-strike itself.²⁵

A hunger-strike is a matter of all or nothing. Although the hunger-strikers were demanding a dialogue, they must have known that their hunger-strike closed the door on such negotiations and that they were heading for a confrontation. Negotiations now could only be interpreted in one way, namely as the defeat of the authorities. Such a loss of face the latter could not possibly afford, and the only course left to them was to attack, and try to win a decisive victory over the students.

The students could only have brought about real negotiations by taking a moderate stand, and in so doing strengthen as much as possible Zhao's position within the leadership. The more conservative leaders had nothing to gain from a compromise with the students, and had made it clear long ago that they considered the students to be nothing but a group of agitators. The hunger-strike provided the conservatives with a powerful argument: it showed that the students were bent on starting a rebellion after all, and were not, as Zhao had claimed, interested in a discussion about a set of reasonable demands.

Paradoxically, the hunger-strike forced Zhao to commit himself even more fully to the movement. His strategy had failed, and his final defeat within the leadership would only be a matter of time. His only hope was to strengthen the movement as much as he could to prevent its impending suppression at the hands of the conservatives.

This desperate tactic of Zhao's could only have been success-

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ful, however, if both the hunger-strikers and the conservatives had come to realize what a disastrous course they were steering. However, the development of the movement had been such that both the conservatives and the hunger-strikers could only continue on the path towards confrontation, because even the slightest hesitation would be capitalized on by the more moderate elements in their own camps. In sum, the presence of more moderate elements, who were interested in a dialogue, both among the students and among the party leaders, made that same dialogue impossible. On the one hand, the moderates were too weak to stop the confrontationalist elements in their camp, while, on the other, they were too strong to be brushed aside completely. This meant that the confrontationalists were denied sufficient room to manoeuvre in order to contemplate a dialogue themselves.

Still, it can be argued that it was exactly because of the hunger-strike that the movement achieved a significance far greater than that of any other popular movement. It finally released the spirit which had been locked up in its bottle for so long. A hunger-strike is a very powerful form of political action.²⁶ A person who is willing to suffer death and, even worse, slow bodily decay because of the refusal to eat the food produced by a society ruled by an unworthy government must be morally superior to ordinary humans, be they rulers or subjects. The immediate compassion felt for such a person, and the suspension of doubt about the validity of her or his cause, go hand in hand with the direct hatred felt for the government whose wickedness caused the hunger-strike. Instead of being interpreted as a calculated political move, a hunger-strike is perceived as the curse of the evil and powerful inflicted upon the good and powerless.

The hunger-strike at Tian'anmen Square also made the movement a national one, although in fact connections between students in Beijing and elsewhere had been maintained since the start of the movement. Representatives of the students in Beijing had been sent to other university towns (Li Lu 1990: 114; Shen 1991: 183), while students in other cities had already started to organize their own demonstrations and sent delegations to Beijing to link up with the students there. These students reported back regularly to their home universities by phone, fax, or by sending a representative.

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This pattern of sending delegations and representatives to and from the centre of the movement had also played an important role in Republican student movements and especially during the Cultural Revolution. It was widely recognized as a vital element of China's repertoire of protest, because it served as a countermeasure against the authorities' attempts to contain social unrest. On a more cognitive level it was important, too, because it expressed the national, instead of the local significance of protest movements. As such, students' experiences of travel and linking up have been crucial ways to act out China's unified polity, and have served to reproduce China's nationalism among its future élite. This, and the support students received on their way to and from Beijing were therefore similarly important in constructing the People's Movement as a national event, not only in the geographic sense, but also in terms of its social support base. The experiences of two students from Xi'an who I spoke with in Beijing on 21 May are a good example both of this pattern and of the role of the Chinese media after Zhao's reappraisal of the movement in early May:

The two students from Xi'an tell me that there, too, strikes had broken out at the universities and in the work units, and that a hunger-strike had been started. Since 6 May and especially since the hunger-strike in Beijing the local newspapers in Xi'an had carried a lot of news about the situation in Beijing. When Gorbachov arrived in China students from Beijing University came to Jiaotong University in Xi'an. Afterwards, when the two Xi'an students came to Beijing they did not have to pay for their tickets, and were offered tea and water during the trip. (Summary of tape 38: 2)

Yet, only with the occupation of Tian'anmen Square by the hunger-strikers did the movement become a truly national event, with active participation by students from all over China, instead of a Beijingers affair merely witnessed by delegations from elsewhere. The hunger-strike provided both a sense of urgency and the opportunity for everybody to make a concrete contribution, which encouraged much larger delegations from all over China to come and participate. At different points in time during and after the hunger-strike, the student delegations from outside Beijing were organized under different names, like the Autonomous Union of Students from Outside of Beijing

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(*Waidi xuesheng zizhi lianhui*, or *Waigaolian*), the Nationwide Command Post for Supporting the Students (*Quanguo shengyuan tongxue zhihui*), or the Preparatory Education Committee of the Nationwide Union of Institutes of Higher Education (*Quanguo gaoxiao lianhui chowuwei*) (Luo *et al.* 1990: 30–31, 39; Shen 1991: 282).

This was a very welcome development to the leaders of the hunger-strike. The students from outside Beijing strengthened their hand even further at the expense of the original leaders of the student movement. At the same time, however, it also contributed to the radicalization of the movement, and made it more and more unlikely that a compromise with the authorities could be reached.

Although the arrival of large numbers of students from outside Beijing was an important development, within the political context of the People's Movement by far the most significant aspect of the hunger-strike was that it gave the people of Beijing a de-politicized vehicle for political action. The hunger-strike made it possible to demonstrate simply to support the hunger-striking students (*shengyuan xuesheng*). It was both the spark and the excuse to express actively through demonstrations the long-felt sympathy for the students, born out of the dissatisfaction with the regime and its policies, but at the same time leaving this political message unstated. All one expressed openly was that the leaders, who let the hunger-strikers die by refusing to talk to them, were inhuman and unfit to govern. On the one hand, this made it very difficult for the government to label these demonstrations counterrevolutionary and crack down on them. On the other hand, it made it possible for just about everybody, even party members in important party and government organizations, to demonstrate for the resignation of individual leaders, without allowing anyone to doubt their unflinching loyalty to the party and socialism.

The first to realize the potential of the hunger-strike were reform-oriented intellectuals. They understood that the student movement had deepened the rift between the conservatives and the pragmatic reformers within the top leadership. They knew that the next few days would decide the fate of the pragmatic reformers. When the hunger-strike provided the opportunity to demonstrate at last, these intellectuals knew that it was up to them to set the example, and a large demonstration was held by them on 15 May.

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The intellectuals had added a new and decisive element to the repertoire of the movement which would allow it to grow into a genuine *people's* movement. That the first demonstration of the intellectuals happened on the same day Gorbachov arrived in Beijing, was of course no coincidence. It guaranteed maximum coverage by the domestic and foreign press, and severe loss of face for the Chinese government. The whole world was there to see that the Chinese authorities had lost their grip on their own capital. Not even a state visit of historic importance to China, and the supposedly final display of Deng Xiaoping's international statesmanship, could be carried out according to plan. Instead of the welcoming ceremony, scheduled to be held at Tian'anmen Square, the authorities had no option but to improvise an alternative reception at Beijing airport, because the hunger-strikers refused to vacate the square even temporarily.

Zhao himself was quick to rub this in. First, he chose the day of Gorbachov's arrival to give his blessing to the domestic media's truthful and independent reporting of the movement. In this way, the entire nation could witness Deng's and the conservatives' fiasco, while the images of demonstrating students and intellectuals could be displayed and incite people in Beijing and other cities to follow their example. Second, the next day he went on record telling Gorbachov that even after the 13th Party Congress in 1987 it was still Deng Xiaoping who had the last say in all important policy matters. Within the context of the People's Movement, this very general statement which was no more than what everybody knew to be true anyway served as a cue for his disagreement with Deng. At the time, 'important policy matters' could only be interpreted as the way the authorities were handling the student movement. Zhao was saying in effect that the tough stand towards it was Deng's, and no his own decision and responsibility.²⁷

Zhao's open criticism of Deng, the hunger-strike, and the example of the intellectuals sparked off mass demonstrations by work unit delegations on 17 and 18 May. The new demonstrations were so large in scale that they amounted to a general strike in the Beijing area. Much more important than this instrumental aspect, however, were the moral and cognitive ones. The new demonstrators consciously styled themselves as two political actors who are crucial in Marxist theory, namely 'the people' and 'the workers', by carrying banners with slogans