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The Suppression of the April Fifth Movement and the Persecution of "Counterrevolutionaries" in 1976

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This article deals with the suppression of the so-called April Fifth Movement of 1976, when hundreds of thousands of people throughout mainland China commemorated the late Premier Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai) and protested against the radical left on the occasion of the Ch'ing-ming (Qingming) festival.

The decision-making processes leading to suppression and persecution in 1976 were dominated by beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution and the radical left. The veteran cadres who might have been sympathetic to the demonstrations were under heavy political pressure at that time and had no say during the crucial Politburo sessions. Hence, the decision to suppress the demonstrations was reached unanimously, and there was no polarization between supporters and opponents of a violent crackdown as in 1989.

The campaign against "counterrevolutionaries" initiated by the central leadership in the wake of the 1976 demonstrations brought terror to large parts of the population and, in some regions, triggered brutal excesses. The majority of the population bowed to the political persecution, but there also were many instances of open protest and resistance. In addition, the call to expose the "backstage bosses" of the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations led to uncontrollable attacks on local Party leaders and violent clashes between rival factions in many places.

A comparison of the two repressive campaigns in 1976 and 1989 shows that, aside from the Tienanmen (Tiananmen) massacre of 1989, the extent of political persecution in the wake of the two movements appears to be on a quite similar level and that the measures taken in 1989 shared many basic features with those of 1976.

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In its response to protest demonstrations, mainland China's Communist leadership faces a serious dilemma. On the one hand, it has to exaggerate the extent of chaos and disorder so as to discredit the demonstrations in the eyes of the population and countermobilize the Party and security apparatus. On the other hand, it must play down

the extent of opposition revealed by such demonstrations to avoid fueling doubts about the legitimacy of the regime. For this reason, in the case of popular protests, Communist media talk about serious "counterrevolutionary" unrest, but denounce only a "handful" of instigators, troublemakers, and bad elements who have led astray the unsuspecting masses.

The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pursued this strategy when cracking down on demonstrators in 1989. It had already used the same arguments to justify the suppression of the so-called April Fifth Movement in 1976, when hundreds of thousands of people throughout mainland China commemorated the late Premier Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai) and protested against the radical left during the Ch'ing-ming (Qingming) festival.¹

The April Fifth Movement is doubtlessly a significant event in the history of Communist China. But to this day, our knowledge of the impact of the suppression and the ensuing campaign against counter-revolutionaries, that brought terror to large parts of the population, is still limited.² This paper attempts to examine the decision-making processes leading to suppression and persecution in 1976, the repressive measures taken in Peking (Beijing) and the provinces, and the popular response to the repression. In the concluding sections, a closer look at the victims is taken in order to assess the overall impact of the repressive campaign on the population and to put it into perspective.

Repressive Measures Accompanying the Demonstrations

Rumors that memorial ceremonies would be held at Ch'ing-ming, in defiance of official warnings and bans, had become widespread in

Peking during the middle of March 1976. On March 26, the Peking Public Security Bureau (PSB) had already given orders to register all work units and individuals laying wreaths at Ch'ing-ming. Every suspicious activity on Tienanmen (Tiananmen) Square was observed by plain-clothes security men and photographed from the rooftops of surrounding buildings. At this time, the authorities were convinced that they could come to grips with the situation without facing more serious incidents.³

During the demonstrations, members of the security apparatus and journalists from the *People's Daily* gathered information in the crowd. This is how ten detailed situation reports were compiled, serving as an important source of information for the Party leadership. Before those reports were delivered to the Politburo and Mao, they went through the hands of Yao Wen-yüan (Yao Wenyuan), then head of the propaganda apparatus, who manipulated their contents by deleting whole sections, making distorting comments, and giving the impression that the demonstrations were a general attack on the Party leadership.⁴

Even before the Ch'ing-ming activities had gained momentum in Peking, the news of the Nanking (Nanjing) demonstrations and protests had made the central leadership and security apparatus uncomfortable. On March 30, Wang Hung-wen (Wang Hongwen) suspected that the Nanking incidents were part of a plan for a "counter-revolutionary restoration."⁵ On the evening of April 1, the Politburo met in Peking to discuss the demonstrations in Nanking and other places (Teng Hsiao-p'ing [Deng Xiaoping] and Yeh Chien-ying [Ye Jianying] did not attend this session). The Politburo instructed Wang Hung-wen to convey a telephone directive to the provincial leadership in Nanking on how to deal with the incidents.⁶ Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) approved this decision after his nephew Mao Yüan-hsin (Mao

¹A juxtaposition of media stereotypes after the two Tienanmen incidents in 1976 and 1989 is included in *Liang-tz'u T'ien-an-men shih-chien* (The two Tienanmen incidents) (Hong Kong: T'ien-ho ch'u-pan-she, 1989), 113-25. The typical strategies for self-justification of Communist regimes in dealing with popular protests are also strikingly put forward in the "Warsaw Letter" of 1968. See *Europa Archiv* 16 (1968): 388-93.

²An early examination of the political persecution in 1976, based on the limited sources accessible then, was made by John Gardner, *Chinese Politics and the Succession to Mao* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 86-97. Detailed Chinese accounts are contained in T'ung Huai-chou, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung* (The great April Fifth Movement) (Peking: Pei-ching ch'u-pan-she, 1979), 185-224; Yen Chia-ch'i et al., *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih* (A factual record of the April Fifth Movement) (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan-she 1979), 107-31; and Yang K'uang-man and Kuo Pao-ch'en, "Destiny," in *Li-shih tsai che-li ch'en-ssu*, ed. Chou Ming (History is reflected here), vol. 2 (Peking: Hua-hsia ch'u-pan-she, 1986), 284-309.

³Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 28; T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 60.

⁴See the evidence listed in T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 192-95. See also Gardner, *Chinese Politics*, 87-90.

⁵Fan Shuo, *Yeh Chien-ying tsai i-chiu-ch'i-liu* (Yeh Chien-ying in 1976) (Peking: Chung-kung chung-yang tang-hsia ch'u-pan-she, 1990), 86.

⁶After Teng Hsiao-p'ing's demotion in February, the "Wang Hung-wen Bureau" had taken over part of the routine work of the Party center. Wang had taken special care of Party affairs in East China since 1974. Interviews in Nanking in 1987. See also Keith Forster, "Spontaneous and Institutional Rebellion in the Cultural Revolution: The Extraordinary Case of Weng Senhe," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 27 (January 1992): 62.

Yuanxin) delivered a written report on the Politburo session to him.⁷ In the following days, the instructions were circulated all over mainland China to prevent people from participating in Ch'ing-ming demonstrations. The "telephone circular" denounced the attacks on the radicals and labeled the events in Nanking as "political incidents" attempting to split the Party center and twist the direction of the campaign for criticizing Teng. The regional leadership was ordered to take "effective measures" against the activities immediately and to pursue the "backstage bosses" of the incidents. The masses were admonished not to believe "political rumors," especially the faked "testament of Chou En-lai," then being spread among the populace.⁸

The central directive given to the provincial leadership in Nanking was circulated among Peking work units along with sharp official warnings against participating in memorial ceremonies and gatherings on Tienanmen Square. Every police station and the street committees under their supervision received orders to strengthen security work, observe suspicious elements, and prevent class enemies from participating in Ch'ing-ming activities. The Peking PSB strengthened its undercover security forces, set up a command post in the southeast corner of the square, kept mobile reserves on the alert, and gave guidelines on arresting participants of the demonstrations: under no circumstances would "public counterrevolutionary sabotage activities" be tolerated in the capital. For this reason, thirty-nine suspected activists were arrested between April 2 and 4.⁹

As the demonstrations gained momentum, "Operational Plan No. 3" for the people's militia was put into action. All work units, according to their size, had to put a certain number of their members at the disposal of the militia headquarters. Initially, they were not told any details of the purpose of their mobilization.¹⁰

On April 4, Peking detention centers and prisons were ordered to prepare to receive a great number of new prisoners. That day (Sunday), about five thousand militia members and three thousand security men, operating in plain clothes or pretending to be militia

members, were deployed on the square. For fear of an attack on the "Great Hall of the People" on the west side of the square, about one thousand heavily armed soldiers (probably belonging to the Central Guard Division, then usually called Unit 8341) were transferred to the Hall.¹¹

Crisis Session of the Politburo

Hua Kuo-feng (Hua Guofeng), who, after Teng's disgrace, headed the work of the Party center, convened the Politburo on the evening of April 4 to debate the incidents on Tienanmen Square. Only ten members and three alternate members of the body were present during this session, so it was a considerably shrunk Politburo which had to decide whether to suppress the demonstrations. Moreover, because of diverse political (Teng Hsiao-p'ing, Yeh Chien-ying, Li Hsien-nien [Li Xiannian]) or physical (Chu Te [Zhu De], Liu Po-ch'eng [Liu Bocheng]) problems, as well as absences from Peking (Hsü Shih-yu [Xu Shiyu], Wei Kuo-ch'ing [Wei Guoqing], Li Te-sheng [Li Desheng]), only one veteran cadre, alternate member Su Chen-hua (Su Zhenhua), attended the meeting. Hence, the beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution and the radical left were in exclusive command that evening.¹²

Hua opened the session by stating that in several poems and statements Chairman Mao and the Party center had been "directly" attacked and that some of the attacks were "extremely vicious." Wu Te (Wu De) gave a detailed oral report to the Politburo. As Party chief of Peking city, he was instrumental in shaping the crisis definition of the central leadership. Because the Peking Municipal Party Committee carries the immediate responsibility for dealing with demonstrations in the capital, it is inclined to "preventively" assess spontaneous mass actions as being part of a dangerous conspiracy to overthrow the government. In this respect, parallels between the decision-making

⁷Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 95.
⁸The circular is reprinted in "Wen-ke" *yen-chiu tzu-liao* (Research material on the Cultural Revolution), vol. 3 (Peking: Kuo-fang ta-hsueh, 1988), 417.

⁹*Huang-ho* (Yellow River) (Hong Kong), no. 1 (May 16, 1976): 4, 8; Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 99-100; Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 75.
¹⁰*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih* (A documentation of Ch'ing-ming 1976) (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1980), 181-85.
¹¹Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 94; T'ung Huai-chou, ed., *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chien-wen-lu* (Eyewitness accounts of Ch'ing-ming 1976) [hereinafter cited as *Chien-wen-lu*] (Peking: Kung-jen ch'u-pan-she, 1979), 100-101; *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 84.
¹²For the decision-making process, see Roderick MacFarquhar, "Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15, *Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 358-65; Sebastian Heilmann, *Die Gegen-Kulturrevolution in der VR China: Die 'Bewegung vom 5. April' und der soziale Protest der siebziger Jahre* (The counter-Cultural Revolution in the PRC: The April Fifth Movement and the grassroots protest of the seventies) (forthcoming), chap. 5, which also includes detailed information on available sources.

process in 1976 and 1989 are obvious.¹³ In 1976, Wu Te denounced the demonstrations as being pre-planned and accused Teng Hsiao-p'ing of instigating the incidents by manipulating public opinion. Wu insisted that the incidents were counterrevolutionary.

Chiang Ch'ing (Jiang Qing), the main target of allusions and attacks brought forward on the square, demanded that rigorous steps be taken against the demonstrations and blamed Wu Te, Peking Military Region commander Ch'en Hsi-lien (Chen Xilian), and police chief Liu Ch'uan-hsin (Liu Chuanxin) for not being able to guarantee the security of the Party center. She insisted on clearing and blocking off the square. Wang Tung-hsing (Wang Dongxing), the head of the Central Guard Division, supported her proposal to put an end to the demonstrations.¹⁴

Those members of the Politburo present were obviously shocked by the events and closed ranks. Their response to the demonstrations was unanimous. It was not the radicals alone who found the spontaneous mass actions intolerable and demanded a crackdown. There was no polarization between supporters and opponents of a violent suppression, as in 1989. All felt threatened by the massive demonstrations and collaborated in initiating the suppression.

During the meeting on April 4, it was stated that a decisive "counterattack" against this extremely serious "adverse current" had to be launched before Labor Day and the masses mobilized to combat the counterrevolution. The square was ordered to be cleared during the night. The next day, the Heroes' Monument was blocked off and the masses persuaded to stop their commemorative ceremonies. Because until then there had not been any major riots, several members of the Politburo proposed postponing a violent crackdown to see how things developed. This partially explains why the security forces appeared to be so indecisive the next day. Mao Yüan-hsin, who had attended the meeting, wrote a report and presented it to Mao for approval.¹⁵

Escalation and Crackdown

During the night, the measures that led to the escalation of the

demonstrations were carried out: with the help of two hundred trucks, all wreaths and posters were removed from the square and burned in Papaoshan (Babaoshan) Cemetery. More than one hundred people who had stayed at the monument during the night were searched and about twenty of them were taken into custody.¹⁶

On the morning of April 5, militia members were told that "a handful of counterrevolutionaries" had instigated unrest on Tiananmen Square and received orders to protect the Great Hall of the People.¹⁷ The presence of the security forces was now so strong that it became nearly impossible to lay wreaths.

Operational orders remained vague until the evening of April 5. The security organs did not intervene on their own initiative, but waited for orders from the Party center. This was one of the reasons for the conspicuous passivity of the security forces, particularly after the demonstrations had turned violent. In addition, the destruction of their command post by the crowd apparently caused a temporary breakdown of communications between the operational forces and their leadership. The police and militia seem to have been taken by surprise by the riots and the resistance they faced, as a police report later admitted.¹⁸ For these reasons, one would hardly be justified in interpreting the indecisiveness of the security forces as a moderate, cautious reaction.¹⁹

Several members of the Politburo watched the clashes and riots escalate during the day from the roof of the People's Hall. Although Chang Ch'un-ch'iao (Zhang Chunqiao) saw parallels to the Hungarian uprising in 1956, he forbid the use of fire-arms against the crowd. Chiang Ch'ing suggested using sticks instead, and her proposal met with approval by the other leaders.²⁰ In the name of the Politburo, the municipal authorities were ordered to prepare suppressive operations for the afternoon. Only at 6:30 p.m. was an appeal spoken by Wu Te transmitted through the loudspeaker system on the square, which urged the "revolutionary masses" to leave immediately and

¹⁶Ibid., 97; T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 121-22.

¹⁷*Peking Daily*, April 14, 1976.

¹⁸Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 100; Gerd Ruge, *Begegnung mit China* (Approaching China) (Düsseldorf and Vienna: Econ, 1978), 398, 407-8; T'ung, *Chien-wen-lu*, 139.

¹⁹As was done by the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 16, 1976, 11: "On the whole, the Chinese authorities must be congratulated on their handling of a very ugly situation."

²⁰*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 84.

¹³For the role of the municipal Party establishment in 1989, see Alan P. L. Liu, "Aspects of Beijing's Crisis Management," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 5 (May 1990): 511.

¹⁴*Cheng-ming* (Contention) (Hong Kong), 1979, no. 4:14.

¹⁵Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 95-97.

resist the manipulations of "bad elements." In the next three hours, most of those present followed these instructions and dispersed.

At 9:30 p.m., the suppression was initiated "by orders from the Municipal Revolutionary Committee" (i.e., the municipal government). About ten thousand militia members received the following order: "At present, counterrevolutionary ruffians are creating a disturbance on Tienanmen Square. The workers' militia of our capital has to fight a bloody battle with them through to the end . . . everybody takes a wooden stick. No matter whether male, female, young, or old: No one must escape."²¹ Thereafter, the militia, three thousand members of special security forces, and five battalions of the Peking garrison started their operation against the demonstrators.²²

Western eyewitnesses could only partially realize what was going on at the monument. Between 9:30 and 11 p.m., groups of thirty or thirty-five people were separated from the crowd surrounding the monument and were led across the square into the Forbidden City by militia members holding sticks. No foreigners were close enough to confirm that bloody fights had taken place.²³ According to Chinese eyewitnesses, about four hundred people had been encircled at the monument, struck down, shackled, and later driven away. Memories of those arrested that evening document the harsh brutality of individual militia members: some of them beat people who already lay fettered on the ground with brutal blows to the head until they lost consciousness. By 2 a.m. all those arrested had been driven away on trucks. On April 6, a number of blood stains were still visible on the square.²⁴

The Security Forces

Rumors in Peking and Hong Kong had it that the militia units taking part in the suppression had not come from Peking city but from the suburbs and surrounding counties as well as from Tientsin (Tianjin). Those units had not known what was going on in Tienanmen Square.²⁵

According to available sources, such assumptions are not credible: many Peking work units had received orders to send people for the militia operation. Except for isolated acts of insubordination,²⁶ every work unit followed this instruction. But many enterprises took pains not to send the best workers so as to maintain a smooth production process. That is why many unmanageable workers were among the militia units who became conspicuous by their undisciplined behavior.²⁷ In addition, many militia members had been violently attacked and cursed during the day. Tension between demonstrators and the militia steadily escalated and erupted into riots and the brutal crackdown in the evening.

The operations of the security forces on April 5 were coordinated by the Peking PSB head Liu Ch'uan-hsin in cooperation with two deputy commanders of the Peking militia, Ma Hsiao-liu (Ma Xiaoliu) and Chang Shih-chung (Zhang Shizhong). They held close contacts with supporters of the radical left in the leadership of the Ministry of Public Security, Chu Chia-yao (Zhu Jiayao) and Shih I-chih (Shi Yizhi).²⁸ Politburo alternate member Ni Chih-fu (Ni Zhifu) (nominal commander of the Peking militia), who was later attacked as a "criminal butcher" on wall posters for his alleged role in the suppression, had already distanced himself from the radicals in the years before and kept a low profile during the repressive operations.²⁹

During the sudden encirclement of the demonstrators at 9:30 p.m., special police or Central Guard Division units (in plain clothes) are said to have played a key role. The militia was later praised in the media for its leading role but, in fact, it proved to be very inefficient and cumbersome that day.³⁰

In contrast to the events in 1989, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) played no key role in the suppression of 1976. Unofficial sources claimed that PLA units moved into action only after a delay.

²¹T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 152.

²²*Kuan-yü chien-kuo i-lai Tang te jo-kan wen-t'i te chüeh-i chu-shih-pen* (Annotated edition of the resolution on some questions in the history of the Party since the founding of the PRC) (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1983), 416.

²³The observations made by Western eyewitnesses are summarized by Ruge, *Begegnung mit China*, 431-32; see also *The Times*, April 6, 1976.

²⁴T'ung, *Chien-wen-lu*, 138-39, 141, 146-47.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 139; *Ming-pao yüeh-k'an* (Ming-pao Monthly) (Hong Kong), 1977, no. 4:15.

²⁶*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 141, 199-200.

²⁷Ch'i Hsin, *The Case of the Gang of Four* (Hong Kong: Cosmos, 1977), 140.

²⁸See Document of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party *Chung-fa* (1977) No. 37 (Part I), translated in *Issues & Studies* 14, no. 7 (July 1978): 96-102. For Liu's background, see Yang and Kuo, "Destiny," 285-86.

²⁹For information on the militia leadership, see *Issues & Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 1978): 92-93; *Ch'i-shih nien-tai* (The Seventies) (Hong Kong), 1977, no. 4:6; *Cheng-ming*, 1988, no. 5:11.

³⁰David Bonavia in *The Times*, September 28, 1976; Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 100. See also James C. F. Wang, "The Urban Militia as a Political Instrument in the Power Contest in China in 1976," *Asian Survey* 16, no. 6 (June 1976): 541-59.

In May 1976, the leaders of the Peking Garrison (particularly its commander Wu Chung [Wu Zhong] and its political commissar Li Chung-ch'i [Li Zhongqi]) are said to have been criticized for their indecisiveness and hesitation in sending troops to help in the suppression.³¹ In the following years, Ch'en Hsi-lien, then commander of the Peking Military Region who headed the Defense Ministry in place of Yeh Chien-ying, was attacked on wall posters for his alleged role in the suppression, although he personally had not much to do with the small-scale PLA operations on April 5. The responsibility of Hua Kuo-feng, then minister of public security, and Wang Tung-hsing, who exercised considerable authority over the Peking security apparatus, in the suppression of the April Fifth Movement still remains in the dark.³²

Political Persecution in Peking

In the early morning of April 6, and several times during the day, some of the Politburo members present in Peking gathered to hear a Municipal Party Committee report on the incidents. The incidents were unanimously assessed to have had the "character of a counterrevolutionary rebellion," and that the headquarters of this rebellion had to be discovered. Thirty thousand militia members were ordered to the city center and, in addition, nine battalions of the Peking Garrison were kept on the alert.³³ The Politburo wanted to be prepared for "even bigger incidents." In the morning and in the afternoon of April 7, Mao Yüan-hsin made detailed reports on the riots and on the Politburo decisions to Chairman Mao. Mao explicitly confirmed the verdict on the counterrevolutionary activities, elevated Hua Kuo-feng to the premiership and the first vice chairmanship of the Party, dismissed Teng from all his positions, and ordered his decisions to be published in the media. On the evening of April 7, those "brilliant resolutions" were made known to the public together with the verdict on the Tienanmen incident.

³¹*Ming-pao yüeh-k'an*, 1976, no. 5:15; *Chan-wang* (Prospect) (Hong Kong), no. 366 (May 1, 1977): 22-23.

³²Even the political section of the Peking PSB, "Section 13," was subordinate to the General Office of the CCP Central Committee, then led by Wang. See AFP, Paris, December 15, 1978, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: People's Republic of China* [hereinafter cited as *FBIS-CHI*] 78-243 (December 18, 1978): E1-2.

³³See note 22 above.

Beginning on April 6, the presence of the security forces was massively increased in the center of Peking. Around the clock, militia units patrolled the streets, checking cars and passers-by. Security for members of the Party leadership and government buildings was strengthened. After a bomb attack on the Soviet embassy on April 29, security provisions were again reinforced: soldiers began to patrol the streets with bayonets ready.³⁴

On April 10 and 11, the Peking public security organs issued instructions for the persecution of counterrevolutionaries. "Wire-pullers behind the scenes" and organizers of demonstrations as well as authors of rumors, poems, pamphlets, and other writings were supposed to be the focus of this search. Those who had taken part in the April 5 riots but had escaped arrest were targets of special operations. The guiding principle of the campaign was: "Loyal to Chairman Mao, merciless to the enemy!"³⁵

The media, then largely controlled by the radicals, accused "a group of counterrevolutionary elements hostile to the Party, to the people, and to socialism" of having instigated the incidents. "New and old bourgeois elements," "reactionary scribblers," "violent desperados," and "fascist thugs" had attacked Chairman Mao and the Party center, painted a "black picture" of the Chinese socialist system, and slandered the dictatorship of the proletariat.³⁶

The campaign for the suppression of counterrevolutionaries was carried out by the Chinese police apparatus with great arbitrariness. The police arrested people at will without evidence or warrants. The arrests made on April 5 were regarded as insignificant because the majority of those apprehended had been onlookers or passers-by. Only after April 6 were extensive and systematic arrests made, often spectacularly staged as a sudden exposure or arrest during mass meetings. Security personnel had to be redistributed for the special purposes of the repression. Every security unit in enterprises and other departments was mobilized, and special commissions were sent in the most

³⁴*New York Times*, July 26, 1976; Central News Agency (Taipei), July 12, 1976, in British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, *The Far East*, FE/5260 (July 15, 1976): BII/12; AFP, Hong Kong, May 12, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-94* (May 13, 1976): E1.

³⁵See T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 199, and the Tientsin version of these instructions, cited in *Chan-wang*, no. 396 (August 1, 1978): 13.

³⁶*People's Daily*, April 8 and 27, and May 18, 1976; *Hsiieh-hsi yü p'i-p'an* (Studies and Criticism) (Shanghai), 1976, no. 5:3-9, 13-14, 21-23.

serious cases. In April and May, the Peking Communist Youth League organized "mobile reporter teams" to spread information on the "counterrevolutionary incident" in work units and mobilize the population to chase fugitive "class enemies."³⁷

Beginning in May, police and militia carried out extensive house-to-house searches in Peking and the surrounding counties to find those who had taken part in the riots and evidence on the demonstrations. Rusticated youths and their dormitories were one of the main objects of these searches.³⁸ Denunciation, slander, and opportunism were encouraged by security forces. Even people who had only been on the square to watch the events became targets of endless interrogations and public criticism meetings. Most of them were assessed as being "politically unreliable," a label henceforth carried in their dossiers. Their relatives and friends were caught up in the repressive measures, had to attend "study classes," and were kept under surveillance by their work units.³⁹

Individual rioters became targets of nationwide searches. Cooperation and exchange of evidence between regional security organs were intensified.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, several activists of the April Fifth Movement managed to escape the police. The limits of the security apparatus were revealed by the fact that it was not successful in tracing the authors of several prominent poems and slogans in Peking and Nanking. The chase after counterrevolutionaries did not focus on individual activists of the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations but was broadened to a campaign bringing terror to large parts of the population. This aggravated the popular aversion toward the security forces and the radicals.

From April until June 1976, numerous mass criticism meetings, show trials, and secret trials against demonstrators were held. About those events, information is scarce. Three Tienanmen activists (two workers and one middle school student) were publicly criticized and sentenced to forced labor during a mass meeting at Peking University

³⁷Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 111-12; Kao Kao and Yen Chia-ch'i, *Chung-kuo "wen-ke" shih-nien shih* (The ten-year history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution) (Hong Kong: Ta-kung pao-she, 1986), 579, 626.

³⁸*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 163.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 104; Yang and Kuo, "Destiny," 290; *Peking Daily*, January 18, 1979.

⁴⁰Editorial Office of *Shang-fang t'ung-hsün* [Newsletter on Popular Complaints and Requests], *Ch'un-feng hua-yü* (Lessons to be learned), 2 vols. (Peking: Ch'un-chung ch'u-pan-she, 1981 [for internal circulation only]), 2:219.

On April 29. A short time later, ten other participants were sentenced to up to thirty years of forced labor. Information that two or three Tienanmen demonstrators had been executed in May, could not be confirmed.⁴¹

By June, the security forces had collected 583 original writings and more than a hundred thousand transcriptions, photos, and other documents from Tienanmen. Six hundred "key cases" had been put together in a "Collection of Evidence concerning the Counterrevolutionary Incident on Tienanmen Square," which circulated nationwide within the police apparatus. Nearly two thousand "major traces" were pursued with special zeal.⁴²

Persecution in the Provinces

The linkage of the various regional incidents and the Tienanmen verdict was apparently made after a delay.⁴³ Between April 18 and 20, 1976, the Party center instructed the provincial leadership how to deal with the local Ch'ing-ming incidents: "Persecute counterrevolutionary political incidents uncompromisingly and suppress the counterrevolution resolutely."⁴⁴ A circular stated that the regional incidents possessed "entirely the same character as the Tienanmen incident" and constituted "counterrevolutionary incidents" or "adverse currents." Teng Hsiao-p'ing was accused of being the "ring leader" of the incidents. In addition, the document called for the pursuit and suppression of the backstage bosses, the sources of political rumors, and other counterrevolutionaries. The masses had to be mobilized

⁴¹Interviews in Peking in 1987 and 1991; Kyodo, May 13, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-94* (May 13, 1976): E5; *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 354-58; *China aktuell* (Hamburg), 1976, no. 6:256-57; AFP, Hong Kong, May 2, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-86* (May 3, 1976): E8-9; AFP, Hong Kong, May 18, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-98* (May 19, 1976): E1; *The Times*, May 15, 1976; *International Herald Tribune*, May 20, 1976.

⁴²Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 169-70; Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 112.

⁴³The linkage was probably urged by Wang Hung-wen in cooperation with radical supporters in the Chekiang Provincial Party Committee. Wang regarded the events in Kiangsu, followed by those in Chekiang, as the most serious among the provincial incidents. See Ch'eng Ch'ao and Wei Hao-pen, eds., *Che-chiang "wen-ke" chi-shih* (A chronicle of the Cultural Revolution in Chekiang) (Hangchow: Che-chiang fang-chih pien-chi-pu, 1989), 254; Keith Forster, "The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident in Hangchow," *Issues & Studies* 22, no. 4 (April 1986): 23.

⁴⁴The wording of the instructions can be reconstructed from speeches given in front of mass meetings in Kiangsu, Chekiang, and Honan. See *Hsin-hua jih-pao* (New China Daily) (Nanking), April 22, 1976; *Chekiang Daily* (Hangchow), April 25, 1976; and *Honan Daily* (Chengchow), April 29, 1976. Headings and key sections are identical.

for this campaign on a large scale. The main targets of the persecution were the "handful of counterrevolutionary elements" who had attacked Chairman Mao and other leading comrades of the Party center with slogans, pamphlets, rumors, and anonymous letters and who had tried to sabotage the campaign against the "rightist revisionist trend" under way at that time. Murderers, arsonists, rapists, and other criminals had to be chased concurrently. For the masses who had been led astray by the manipulations of the class enemies, ideological training was intensified. The instructions emphasized the need to strengthen the Party's guidance in political campaigns, which had to be carried out under the "monistic leadership" of Party committees at all levels. Making contacts and forming associations outside the Party was prohibited, as was joining fighting groups, and disrupting production or education. Organizational discipline was to be maintained in order to fight "anarchism."

Even the leadership of Kiangsu (Jiangsu) Province, which had been slow to react to the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations and had been accused by Wang Hung-wen of being politically passive, joined the campaign. Wherever demonstrations had taken place in the province, huge mass meetings were held encouraging the denunciation and exposure of those who had taken part: the "class enemies" had to be isolated and chased like "stray dogs." The masses were instructed to increase their vigilance a hundredfold to smash all the conspiracies of the class enemy. Police, militia, and soldiers held armed demonstrations and patrolled the streets by night to show the power of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."⁴⁵ In contrast, the actual repression proved to be comparatively sluggish in Nanking. Many grassroots-level cadres had taken part in the demonstrations, and the provincial leadership had no sympathy for the purposes of the radicals in this campaign (for this reason, plans to reorganize the Provincial Party Committee were brought forward by the radicals in July). The Party secretary of Nanking University explained his hesitation in approving arrests with the statement: "Releasing [innocents] is much more difficult than arresting [them]."⁴⁶ Appeals to search for the Ch'ing-ming demonstrators met with little enthusiasm in Nanking. A majority of the population had participated in the commemorative activities at

⁴⁵*Hsin-hua jih-pao*, April 26 and May 12, 1976.

⁴⁶Interviews in Nanking, 1986-88, with activists of the local incidents.

Ch'ing-ming and they were not inclined to take part in their own suppression.

During provincial mass meetings, as a rule, six "active counter-revolutionaries" were usually presented as negative role models. Six types of counterrevolution were represented: anonymous letters, pamphlets, posters, slogans, speeches, and rumors attacking the Party center and/or Chairman Mao. Those criticized were denounced as "counter-revolutionary bellwethers."

In some provinces, the persecution was aggravated by local factional conflicts which had led to violent excesses in the years before. In some conspicuous cases, especially in Chekiang (Zhejiang) and Honan (Henan), members of the Ministry of Public Security intervened in the local persecutions.⁴⁷ In addition to the special commissions within the security apparatus, "bureaus for the persecution of counter-revolutionaries" were set up in factories and administrative units. The investigations had priority over any other activities. Every member of an investigated work unit had to be ready for interrogation and suspects were continuously tailed. In one Sian (Xi'an) factory which had been involved in the local memorial ceremonies at Ch'ing-ming, workers were not allowed to hold private conversations or to stand in groups of more than three people.⁴⁸

In Chengchow (Zhengzhou), Honan Province, one of the local radical opponents of Chou En-lai had been beaten to death during the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations. This killing made the political tension much worse and served as a pretext for particularly rigorous measures. Early on April 7 and 8, arrest warrants for three hundred demonstrators were issued in the name of a special commission led by Yang Kuei (Yang Gui), then vice minister of public security. On April 20, the local incidents were officially condemned as "counter-revolutionary actions carried out under the black banner of the 'four modernizations'." According to incomplete statistics, 304 suspects were imprisoned in Chengchow alone. In addition, about two thousand members of the Railway Bureau were involved in the suppression and 119 of them were arrested. In some work units, up to a third of the members became targets of lengthy investigations.⁴⁹ In the city of

⁴⁷In Chekiang: Chu Chia-yao who was close to the radicals (Forster, "The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident," 26); in Honan: Yang Kuei, a protégé of Politburo member Chi Teng-k'uei (Ji Dengkui) (e.g., *Honan Daily*, April 29, 1976).

⁴⁸*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 383, 393-95.

⁴⁹*Honan Daily*, January 20, 1979.

Loyang (Luoyang), the repression seems to have been especially excessive. Even those who had laid only wreaths without making any political statements suffered repressive measures. Here, the campaign against counterrevolutionaries apparently led to a comprehensive settlement of old accounts in favor of radical factions. In June, a second wave of arrests was unleashed in Honan and many people were sentenced to long prison terms, from twelve years to life.⁵⁰

Numerous leadership cadres from factories and offices were criticized, dismissed, and abused as "backbones of the counterrevolution" in Honan. During house searches, floors and ceilings were torn up in order to find evidence. Frequently, the wives of convicted counterrevolutionaries were forced to do heavy labor alongside ordinary criminals.⁵¹ The lasting influence of the traditional concept of collective liability for criminal offenses is evident in such measures.

In Shenyang, Liaoning Province, a concerted action of tens of thousands of militia and police members was launched in execution of the Central Committee Circular on April 21. All over the city, people were checked and interrogated and houses were searched. The leadership of the northeastern provinces (where no major Ch'ing-ming demonstrations had taken place) pursued the campaign with great zeal. From April 1976 until the end of the same year, many "suspicious elements" who had nothing to do with the Ching-ming demonstrations were arrested as part of preventive measures. In many regions, investigations of cases of political prisoners who had been arrested in the years before were accelerated and brought to a conclusion with harsh sentences and numerous executions. According to statistics of various local security organs, the vast majority of the known "active counterrevolutionaries" were youths, a large proportion of them Party or Youth League members or cadres' children.⁵²

In some regions, real panic about possible revolts was caused by the central instructions to suppress the counterrevolution. In Shanghai, responding to the events in Peking, operational plans for combating

⁵⁰One Honan activist was sentenced to death, but the Provincial Court stayed the execution after an appeal. *Honan Daily*, January 8, 1979; *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 516-26.

⁵¹T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 208; *Kung-jen jih-pao* (Workers' Daily), November 17, 1978.

⁵²Document of the CCP Central Committee *Chung-fa* (1977) No. 37 (Part I), *Issues & Studies* 14, no. 7 (July 1978): 100. Examples for heavy-handed persecution can be found in *Ch'un-feng hua-yü* 2:5, 215-23, 401-2, 463; *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 354-58.

major rebellions were conceived by the security forces.⁵³ A circular issued in Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province on May 2, revealed that the authorities were prepared for serious unrest: "(1) . . . If a rebellion breaks out it must be reported to the higher-level authorities within an hour. (2) When combating a rebellion ask for instructions before using fire-arms. (3) Militia and workers' vigilantes of all units intensify their guard and patrol duties around the clock. Be vigilant against counterrevolutionary sabotage."⁵⁴ Other sources indicate that fire-arms had occasionally been used against riots and protest demonstrations in the months following the April Fifth Movement.⁵⁵

Popular Reactions to the Repression

The majority of the population displayed the then usual conformity to the decisions and measures taken by the Party leadership and bowed to the new political persecutions. In addition, factional conflicts fueled the settling of old accounts during the repressive campaign.

But there is also evidence that large parts of the urban population and of basic-level cadres, at least in some places like Peking and Nanking, were not willing to actively contribute to chasing counterrevolutionaries. They had enough of the endless class struggle campaigns they had suffered from in the preceding years, and were not inclined to be involved in such terrifying campaigns again. The popular commemorative activities for Chou En-lai had pushed the factional cleavages of the Cultural Revolution to the background, at least around the time of the Ch'ing-ming festival. This helped to partially undo the atomization of society and contributed to limiting the impact of the 1976 repression. Nevertheless, everybody was obliged to attend the mass meetings and official demonstrations to show and reconfirm popular loyalty to Chairman Mao and the Party.

⁵³Yang and Kuo, "Destiny," 291-92.

⁵⁴Security Circular No. 9, Hsinhui County, Kwangtung Province. The original is reproduced in *Chan-wang*, no. 355 (November 16, 1976): 20.

⁵⁵"Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Talks Concerning 'Criticizing Teng Hsiao-p'ing and Repulsing Right Deviationist Wind'," *Issues & Studies* 12, no. 12 (December 1976): 94-107. The Chinese version is printed in *Chung-kung nien-pao 1977* (Yearbook on Chinese Communism) (Taipei: 1977), 5/35-39. For an abridged transcription of the same speech, obviously coming from a different source but making the same points, see *Chan-wang*, no. 357 (December 16, 1976): 31.

In contrast to this "great game of feigned compliance" repeatedly staged throughout the history of the PRC,⁵⁶ individual participants or witnesses of the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations attempted to boycott the official loyalty demonstrations or articulated sharp protest against the Tienanmen verdict. In Peking alone, nearly one hundred cases of counterrevolution occurred in the wake of the Tienanmen incident, mostly protesting against the persecution launched by the Party.⁵⁷ In the provinces, several dozen protest activities can be documented. Some stated that the Tienanmen verdict "cannot represent the will of the Chinese people," some claimed that the Tienanmen rebellion was completely justified, and others denounced the "suppression of the revolutionary masses" and called for an even bigger "rebellion against pseudo-Marxism." On the whole, open resistance against the Tienanmen verdict and the repressive measures taken by the regime was isolated but in many cases rather articulate and courageous.⁵⁸

The Search for Backstage Bosses

Beginning in late April, the Ministry of Public Security launched a search for the backstage bosses of the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations suspected of hiding in Party and government positions. The security forces were supposed to pursue traces leading to high cadres. For the radical left, the fall of Teng Hsiao-p'ing and the persecution of the backstage bosses of the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations offered the opportunity to launch a full-scale campaign against their political opponents, the veteran cadres. From the very beginning, some radicals in Peking had claimed that cadres from the Central Committee, the State Council, and the PLA had instigated the demonstrations and that "big fish" could be caught during the persecution. Therefore, the Peking PSB intended to localize the "headquarters of the wirepullers behind the scenes." Eight top cadres (Teng Hsiao-p'ing, Yeh Chien-ying, Liu Po-ch'eng, Teng Ying-ch'ao [Deng Yingchao], Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien [Xu Xiangqian], Liao Ch'eng-chih [Liao Chengzhi], Yü Ch'iu-li [Yu Qiuli], and Wang Chen [Wang Zhen]) were internally

named as suspects. Some of them had either been personally watching the demonstrations from their cars (their plate numbers being registered by the police), or their children or grandchildren had participated in the activities. At the beginning of June, the "Investigation Group for the Tienanmen Incident" of the Ministry of Public Security laid down thirty-five cases which might reveal links to top cadres. Those of the arrested demonstrators who allegedly or actually had been acquainted to the suspected cadres received better treatment in prison in order to win their cooperation.⁵⁹ The involvement of high-level officials and cadres posed serious problems to the security apparatus. Because of their special position, an investigation could only be started with the approval of the Party center. Top cadres of the targeted institutions were almost untouchable just by their high nomenklatura position. Despite these obstacles, several of them (among others: Yeh Chien-ying, Teng Ying-ch'ao and Wang Chen) were tailed and their residences bugged.⁶⁰

In the provinces, too, many high-level cadres were accused of being backstage bosses of local incidents on wall posters and in the security apparatus. In Kiangsu, the second Party secretary of Nanking University, Chang Te (Zhang De), was under heavy pressure because he had approved some commemorative slogans formulated by students at the end of March and because his son had taken an active part in the Nanking protests against the radicals. Chang Te was well acquainted with the first provincial Party secretary, P'eng Ch'ung (Peng Chong), and could have been used as a lever to attack the provincial leadership. Thanks to a well-meaning doctor and loyal friends in the local PSB, Chang Te managed to withdraw from the public, pretending to be ill, and survived the sharp wall poster attacks aimed at him.⁶¹ In Chekiang, two provincial bureau cadres (Chang T'ien-ch'eng [Zhang Tiancheng] and Shuai Ta-yüan [Shuai Dayuan]) were arrested as "wirepullers behind the scenes" of the local Ch'ing-ming incidents. Both of them had maintained contacts with activists from the Hangchow (Hangzhou) demonstrations and had supported them in their actions. Therefore, they were suspected of serving as middlemen for veteran cadres in the provincial leadership (namely for T'ieh Ying

⁵⁶Lucian W. Pye, "China: Erratic State, Frustrated Society," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 59.

⁵⁷Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 129; T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 214-16.

⁵⁸For a collection of regional protests against the Tienanmen verdict, see Heilmann, *Die Gegen-Kulturrevolution* (cited in note 12 above).

⁵⁹T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 201-4; Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 118-20.

⁶⁰Yang and Kuo, "Destiny," 291. For the bugging practices, see Fan, *Yeh Chien-ying*, 133-35, 218.

⁶¹Interviews with Chang Te in Nanking in 1987-88.

(Tie Ying)). As in Nanking, the investigations could not be brought to a conclusion.⁶²

Hua Kuo-feng allegedly did not support the plans to include leading cadres in the persecution and vetoed interrogations and arrests proposed by the security apparatus. Targeted PLA units managed to avoid being subjected to extensive investigation, even if some individual army members could not escape being arrested for their role in the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations.⁶³

Curbing the Campaign

After having chased counterrevolutionaries all over the country for about two months, the campaign came close to getting out of control. The call to expose the backstage bosses within the Party had led to uncontrollable attacks on Party leadership at all levels and violent clashes between rival local factions. Locally propagated slogans like "Every official has made mistakes and every mistake will be opposed" jeopardized the authority of the entire Party.⁶⁴

After a conference of top security cadres in June, the pursuit of persecutions in the inner circles of the Party was discouraged.⁶⁵ Severe conflicts which had erupted in connection with the search for class enemies in several provinces forced the central authorities to curb the campaign. Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Yang Kuei criticized the excessive persecutions and the "chaotic bombardment" of regional authorities triggered by the campaign.⁶⁶ Chang, later accused of leftist deviation himself, warned against "ultra-leftist" excesses and the "evil wind of anarchism" that might lead to a loss of credibility for

the entire Party. The excesses of the persecution had brought adverse effects which had to be corrected by strict Party guidance. The Party center issued new guidelines for chasing class enemies which prohibited forced confessions and tried to restrict the excesses of the campaign. Far-reaching purges, imminent in the months before, were not put into practice. But the factional clashes persisted without interruption in many regions. In August and September, political campaigns were pushed to the background by the Tangshan earthquake which assumed the proportions of a national catastrophe. Nevertheless, there were orders to conclude the cases pending since the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations with sentences or executions.⁶⁷

Over the summer, the preventive measures against "sabotage activities" remained intact in Peking. In September, on the eve of the official commemorative ceremonies for Mao Tse-tung, Peking's population was warned of subversive activities planned by counterrevolutionaries. At the same time, the media praised the people's militia for its role in the suppression of the Tienanmen demonstrations.⁶⁸ The Peking leadership obviously was still in a panic about possible spontaneous mass action during the state ceremonies. On October 14, even after the coup against the "gang of four," one of the young role models promoted by the radicals, Chang T'ieh-sheng (Zhang Tiesheng), emphasized that a repetition of the Tienanmen incident might lead to a "political restoration" all over mainland China.⁶⁹

Arrests

To assess the extent of repression and persecution, the number of those arrested or killed during and in connection with the Ch'ing-ming movement is important. For lack of credible official data, this study has to be content with estimates made on the basis of a wide range of official and unofficial sources.

Immediately after the crackdown, first estimates were given by China watchers in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The then best informed Hong Kong journal *Chan-wang* (Prospect), referring to Peking sources, reported that, during the crackdown on the evening of April 5, more

⁶²Forster, "The 1976 Ch'ing-ming Incident," 26, 28; Ch'eng and Wei, *Che-chiang "wen-ke" chi-shih*, 255.

⁶³Li K'e and Hao Sheng-chang, "*Wen-ke" chung te Jen-min chieh-fang-chün* (The People's Liberation Army during the Cultural Revolution) (Peking: Chung-kung tang-shih tzu-liao ch'u-pan-she, 1989), 180, 182.

⁶⁴"Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Talks," 98-99.

⁶⁵Details on this conference can be found in Document of the CCP Central Committee *Chung-fa* (1977) No. 37 (Part I), *Issues & Studies* 14, no. 7 (July 1978): 96-102; *Hsüeh-hsi t'ung-hsiün* (Studies Newsletter) (Tientsin), no. 12 (1977): 17-19. For contradictory information, see Central News Agency (Taipei), December 27, 1977, in BBC, *SWB: The Far East*, FE/5702 (December 30, 1977: BII/17, which quotes a handbill from Chekiang Province accusing Hua for having collaborated with the radicals during that conference in order to crack down on the veterans.

⁶⁶"Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Talks"; Yang Kuei's report is printed in *Chan-wang*, no. 355 (November 16, 1976): 20.

⁶⁷Interview with a security cadre in Nanking; Yen, *Ssu-wu yüen-tung chi-shih*, 120.

⁶⁸AFP, Hong Kong, September 17, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-182* (September 17, 1976): AA11-12.

⁶⁹Kao and Yen, *Chung-kuo "wen-ke" shih-nien shih*, 656.

than 150 people had been slightly injured, more than 70 seriously injured, and more than 600 had been taken into custody. These figures have been largely confirmed by more recent publications from the mainland.⁷⁰

According to Taiwanese intelligence reports, 3,214 demonstrators were temporarily arrested in Peking in the first days of the suppression. Of those people, more than 1,700 were released between April 8 and 11.⁷¹ In 1977, a British journalist learned from "semi-official sources" in Peking that between 300 and 600 people had been formally imprisoned for their participation in the incidents. After the revision of the Tienanmen verdict, the Peking PSB claimed that 388 demonstrators had been imprisoned.⁷²

Diverse sources claim that, in Peking alone, at least forty thousand people were taken to account in criticism meetings, mostly held in their work units, or were detained and subjected to lengthy interrogations.⁷³ In Shanghai (where no major demonstrations had taken place at Ch'ing-ming), more than three thousand people are said to have been interrogated and persecuted for commemorating Chou En-lai and an unknown number were arrested.⁷⁴ The Hong Kong magazine *Cheng-ming* (Contention) estimated that nationwide, millions of people were entangled in the campaign to suppress the counterrevolution launched after the Tienanmen incident.⁷⁵

Judging by scattered and incomplete data from the provinces, 160 to 200 people were officially imprisoned for their role in Ch'ing-ming activities in Kiangsu, 150 to 160 in Chekiang, up to 100 in Anhwei (Anhui), and between 200 and 400 people in Honan.⁷⁶ To these numbers, many more cases must be added which were dealt with

by alternative, less formal repressive measures common at that time, like detention without trial, separate investigations conducted within the work unit, study classes for political reeducation, and manifold administrative penalties including rehabilitation through labor in camps. Official arrest was only one of many forms of deprivation of personal liberty in the 1970s. No detailed statistics are available on the less conspicuous methods of repression.

Prison Life

Many of those later released described their time in prison as much more cruel than the suppression of the demonstrations and denounced the "barbarian" and "fascist" methods used against them.⁷⁷ The majority of those arrested consisted of young people, among them politically naive children who had taken part in destroying cars and in storming the command post on April 5. Confessions were forced by threats and beatings. Interrogators drew arbitrary conclusions from what the prisoners said and manipulated the records. Political prisoners were taken to mass struggle meetings for humiliation in very bad condition, often weakened by serious injuries or illnesses. Medical provisions were almost nonexistent in prison. Individual prisoners suffered from mental illnesses which provoked even more severe beatings by the guards. In 1978, some released prisoners made known the case of a ten-year-old child who had gone crazy in prison and was treated by the guards with irregular injections without being transferred to a hospital.

In the 1970s, many so-called legal means of torture were applied against prisoners, in addition to the so-called education by stick. Prison personnel widely used special handcuffs which could be tightened to exert pressure on the hand joints so as to force confessions from their victims. Uncontrolled by any authority, many guards obviously enjoyed their role as torturers and threatened to "bury" unsubmitive prisoners together with Teng Hsiao-p'ing. Also, violent criminals were often ordered to supervise political prisoners.

⁷⁰*Chan-wang*, no. 341 (April 16, 1976): 4, and no. 343 (May 16, 1976): 3. Fan Shuo claims that more than two hundred people were injured on April 5. See Fan, *Yeh-Chien-ying*, 99.

⁷¹*Chung-kuo shih-pao* (China Times) (Taipei), May 27, 1976.

⁷²See *The Times*, March 19, 1977, and *People's Daily*, November 19, 1978, respectively.

⁷³"Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Talks," 106; Ruge, *Begegnung mit China*, 434; *Chan-wang*, no. 355 (November 16, 1976): 20, and no. 412 (April 1, 1979): 3; T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 204.

⁷⁴New China News Agency (NCNA), April 5, 1978, as cited by *Chan-wang*, no. 390 (May 1, 1978): 18.

⁷⁵*Cheng-ming*, 1978, no. 12:15.

⁷⁶See Sebastian Heilmann, *Nanking 1976. Spontane Massenbewegungen im Gefolge der Kulturrevolution* (Spontaneous mass movements in the wake of the Cultural Revolution) (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1990), 75-84; *Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 527-33, 354-58; *Honan Daily*, September 17, 1978 and January 9, 1979.

⁷⁷For details, see *Cheng-ming*, 1978, no. 12:17-20; *Tung-hsiang* (Trend) (Hong Kong), 1979, no. 3:14-17; T'ung, *Chien-wen-lu*, 173-79, 190, 194; and *Pei-ching chih ch'un* (Peking Spring), no. 2 (January 27, 1979): 29-34 (Hoover Institution, Stanford, California).

Deaths

It is even more difficult to assess the number of those who lost their lives in connection with the April Fifth Movement. On the evening of April 5, when the security forces used sticks to deal with demonstrators at the Heroes' Monument, many of those arrested were severely beaten. A report written immediately after the events is said to have mentioned that eight people had been killed.⁷⁸ Anyway, it is safe to say that the crackdown of April 5 claimed less victims than the persecution in the following months. In May 1976, numerous executions were carried out in several provinces. In most cases, it is not certain whether those executions had anything to do with the Ch'ing-ming demonstrations.⁷⁹ Apparently, the central authorities had not made clear how to deal with those who had taken part in the Ch'ing-ming actions. Because of unclear instructions, more than one hundred people lost their lives. After learning of those excesses, the Party center allegedly issued orders to refrain from executions for the time being.⁸⁰

On the first anniversary of Chou En-lai's death, in January 1977, Peking wall posters for the first time publicly mentioned the "martyrs" of the 1976 Ch'ing-ming demonstrations.⁸¹ Afterwards, the numbers given of those who had lost their lives continuously increased until the revision of the Tienanmen verdict. In 1978, some wall posters claimed that nearly three thousand people had been killed and that security forces had used fire-arms on April 5.⁸² A few years later, one academic study even speculated on a "bloodbath" during which "tens of thousands" were injured or killed.⁸³ Such claims entirely contradict the accounts given by eyewitnesses present that night, and are certainly wrong.

Taking into account the available sources and estimates, one

can confidently state that, at most, forty to fifty people were killed for their participation in the Peking demonstrations. The majority of those who lost their lives were not killed during the April 5 crackdown or by official execution, but died from injuries, maltreatment, or illnesses while in prison.⁸⁴ Exiled dissident Yen Chia-ch'i (Yan Jiaqi), who witnessed the 1976 Tienanmen incident and co-authored a book on the April Fifth Movement, explained in a 1988 interview that nobody had died on Tienanmen Square that evening. But a number of people had been seriously injured, some died in prison, and individual victims of the persecution committed suicide.⁸⁵

How many victims did the suppression claim nationwide? Events in Tungjen (Tongren) District of Kweichow (Guizhou) Province reported in internal reference materials on Cultural Revolution atrocities,⁸⁶ show that the persecution led to heavy-handed excesses in some regions. In the wake of the Tienanmen incident, overzealous local cadres launched a witch-hunt for counterrevolutionaries. They suspected that local followers of Teng Hsiao-p'ing were planning a rebellion, allegedly supported by thirty-six counterrevolutionary cliques with altogether more than 1,300 members. For a certain period, martial law was declared in Tungjen District. In the crackdown during April and May, 32 people lost their lives as a result of brutal torture or forced suicide; five relatives of demonstrators died from indirect consequences of the repression; and 263 people, mostly youths, were maimed by maltreatment and torture.

In 1977, Taiwanese intelligence agencies claimed that nationwide, up to ten thousand people might have been killed during the persecutions in the spring and summer of the year before.⁸⁷ Even if the suppression of counterrevolutionaries had been carried out in some regions with much greater brutality than in Peking, this number seems far too high. Scarce information on regional events allows only for a rough estimate. Including all regional data, the number of deaths could be set between five hundred and one thousand people. This

⁷⁸Such deaths were reported in Peking (Yen, *Ssu-wu yün-tung chi-shih*, 115-16; *Peking Daily*, September 13, 1978); in Heilungkiang (Heilongjiang) (AFP, Hong Kong, January 1979, in *FBIS-CHI-79-023* [February 1, 1979]: E1; and in Liaoning (*Ping-ch'en Ch'ing-ming chi-shih*, 355).

⁸⁵Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 355, 516.

⁸⁶*Ch'un-feng hua-yü* 1:309-20.

⁸⁷*T'ieh'ing hui-pao* (Reports on the Enemy's Situation) (Taipei), no. 71 (March 14, 1977): 539-40.

⁷⁸See *Chan-wang*, no. 412 (April 1, 1979): 6.

⁷⁹For an extensive collection of such cases, see *Chung-kung nien-pao* 1977, 2/38-39. Information on an execution in Chekiang can be found in Ch'eng and Wei, *Che-chiang "wen-ke" chi-shih*, 255.

⁸⁰"Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Talks," 105.

⁸¹*The Times*, January 11, 1977; Ruge, *Begegnung mit China*, 442-43.

⁸²*Chan-wang*, no. 390 (May 1, 1978): 8; *Die Welt* (Bonn), November 17, 1978.

⁸³Chen Ruoxi, "Democracy Wall and the Unofficial Journals," *Studies in Chinese Terminology*, no. 20 (Berkeley: University of California, Center for Chinese Studies, 1982), 6. See also Cheng Nien, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 470-71.

does not include the numerous victims of armed factional clashes taking place in many regions in 1976.

Conclusions

In the spring of 1976, terror was at the center of Chinese politics once again. The Chinese who had gone through many traumatic times of persecution before, again had to suffer from the terror deliberately initiated by the top Party leadership, as well as from the "situational terror" instituted by lower level cadres and other agents of the regime in their zeal to display their loyalty or pursue factional interests.⁸⁸

In 1976, most of the people affected by the persecutions, especially those who had only taken part in the commemorative ceremonies for Chou En-lai without making political statements, could not see why they were being interrogated and criticized. Everybody lived in fear because of the indiscriminate nature of the interrogations, criticisms, and arrests being made around them. The outcomes of the secret or public trials held at the time were preordained and primarily served as a deterrence.

Although all the typical features of a terrorist regime were displayed, it is questionable whether the campaign launched against counterrevolutionaries in the spring 1976 should be regarded as one of the most extensive mass persecutions in the history of the PRC.⁸⁹ There were far more extensive and protracted persecutions in the years between 1968 and 1972.⁹⁰

A comparison with the suppression of the 1989 pro-democracy movement can serve to put the two periods of political persecution into perspective. An examination of the decision-making processes leading to the crackdowns in 1976 and 1989 reveals two significant differences. In 1976, all members of the Politburo who were present at the crisis sessions unanimously supported a violent suppression.

Table 1
Victims of Repression and Persecution in 1976 and 1989

	1976	1989
Crackdown on Peking demonstrations	Over 200 wounded; 8 died from injuries	Up to 10,000 wounded; at least 1,000 killed
Political persecution in the wake of the movements	<i>In Peking:</i> Ca.40,000 investigated or detained;300 to 600 imprisoned <i>Nationwide:</i> Tens of thousands detained; thousands imprisoned	<i>In Peking:</i> Tens of thousands investigated; several thousand detained or imprisoned <i>Nationwide:</i> Nearly 30,000 detained; over 4,000 imprisoned
Executions and irregular deaths (outside Peking)	Ca.500-1,000	Several hundred

There was no controversy over what kind of reaction might be appropriate, as there was in 1989. But, in effect, the 1976 crackdown itself was much less bloody than the massacre caused by tanks and fire-arms in June 1989. Members of the radical left, later held responsible for many atrocities, apparently rejected the use of fire-arms in 1976, and, by this, helped avert a bloodbath like that of 1989. This restraint was hardly the result of a more highly developed sense of philanthropy. It was made possible by the less threatening character of the 1976 demonstrations and, on the side of the radicals, motivated by a deep mistrust in the loyalty of the PLA which would have played a key role in the case of an intervention involving fire-arms.

Aside from the massacre of 1989, the extent of political persecution in the wake of the two movements appears to be on a quite similar level, judging from the numbers of those directly affected by repressive measures in 1976 and 1989 (see table 1).⁹¹ Moreover, the repressive measures taken in 1989 shared many features with those of 1976, in spite of so much talk about strengthening the legal system

⁸⁸The following discussion is based on Alexander Dallin and George Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), and Leslie Holmes, *Politics in the Communist World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 58-75.

⁸⁹For such an assessment, see *Cheng-ming*, 1978, no. 12:15, and T'ung, *Wei-ta-te ssu-wu yün-tung*, 200.

⁹⁰Those persecutions are dealt with in detail by Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 178-98.

⁹¹For the 1989 data, see Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: The Massacre of June 1989 and its Aftermath* (London: Amnesty International, 1990); Ann Kent, *Between Freedom and Subsistence. China and Human Rights* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 181-86; and *Cheng-ming*, 1991, no. 12:14.

ISSUES & STUDIES

in post-Mao China: urban residents were indiscriminately interrogated and forced to account for their political attitudes and activities; the security organs encouraged and forced people to inform on each other; many people were arbitrarily detained or imprisoned; torture and severe beatings were common in the prisons; and throughout mainland China many were executed after secret, irregular, or even summary trials. The brutality of the 1989 massacre by far exceeded the crack-down on the 1976 demonstrations. But the ensuing political persecution appears to have revealed just the usual patterns of dealing with counterrevolution that had repeatedly been displayed before by the Chinese Communists.