

*S. O. 52*

Remember those smiling faces and the expressions of comradeship between the students and those very people who would become their executioners. We had a notion, as I am sure they did, of a kinder outcome. Remember, too, how during the weeks of fear of imminent confrontation between the Government and the students, our attitude turned to admiration for a society which appeared to be capable of withstanding massive protests with such restraint.

Few leaders of democratic governments would have tolerated, we thought, for so long such massive disruptions of one of their largest cities without some response. We should have been forewarned because it was only a year ago, rather silently, rather quietly, ignored by many nations, that China exercised its army to oppress the efforts in Tibet to pursue freedom. There were deaths there. How many? Few know. There were many injured as well. Many were placed in prison for no other reason than that they sought freedom for an independent Tibet.

Few would have been surprised then had there been used tear gas or water hoses or similar riot control devices. But it was shocking, after such restraint when the protests were weakening to see the full force of Chinese armed might unleashed, to see tens of thousands of battle-hardened troops supported by tanks, personnel carriers and helicopters, a complete and terrible arsenal attacking without quarter the unarmed youth of the country. Who will forget the sputter of AK-42s, the falling bodies, some crushed under tanks, the tearful efforts at rescue. When it was all over, 2,600 of China's young people lay dead in Tiananmen Square. Many, we understand, were trucked off by the army to be incinerated so that their numbers would not be known. At least 60,000 were wounded. Thus, did the People's Army declare war on the people and the Communist leadership held a glorious victory over thugs and robbers. But we know differently. The battle may not yet be over. The leadership, having displayed their contempt for the people, may have to face the Chinese masses.

• (2010)

In the City of Wu Kang, students blocked the railway tracks. There is a general strike in the Province of Chien-chiang. Students have mounted barricades in Shang-hai.

We know too of an internal power struggle continuing in the centre of Chinese power, between the voices of reform and the forces of oppression. As well, it is increasingly evident that the army that was so visible in Tiananmen Square is itself divided between those who sympathized with the struggle and those who support the regime.

The world's leaders, with virtual unanimity, have reacted with shock and horror to the events in China. And so did the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark). When he spoke, I am sure he spoke for all of us and all Canadians in condemning what has happened in China.

We understand and sympathize too with the hurt and frustrated anger of the nearly 4,000 Chinese students in Canada who mourn their brothers and sisters. Canada must say to them: "You are free to stay and benefit from the protection that this democracy affords its citizens as if you were one of us".

As well, we must assure Canadians that our compatriots in China are protected. Some 600 students and embassy staff already have been moved to a safe haven. But there is fear that we know too little about how many Canadians are in China and where they may be. Some are workers, some are tourists. We must make every effort by consulting travel agents, airlines and all possible sources to ascertain their identities and their locations.

It may be that the struggle in China will lead to a new leadership and a new regime that will renounce the terror. So long as there is a glimmer of that possibility, then we should not act precipitously. But we dare not wait too long before translating words of condemnation into action unless they be remembered as empty rhetoric.

There is no doubt that China will suffer immensely as a result of the events there. It is now a nation characterized by chaos and disorder. Inevitably their efforts at economic reform will suffer.

China's foreign relations and its trade with other nations will also suffer because there cannot be business as usual for a nation that treats its own citizens as the Chinese Government has treated theirs.