

Democracy hopes alive in China

by Stephen Mitchell

A York University history professor has returned from China with the impression that the spirit of last summer's democracy movement has in no way crumbled under governmental pressure.

In front of a recent assembly of York students, Diana Lary admitted to having had feelings of "trepidation and fear" on the eve of her visit to the Far East over the Christmas break. Lately, visitors to China have reported sadly on the state of the rebellion, painting conversational pictures of a muffled, demoralized people. Lary, however, discovered that her anxiety was unfounded.

"The spirit hasn't died at all," said Lary. It is still nearly impossible to find a voice that the government will listen to, but people are still talking openly

about democracy, she said.

Lary spoke of a number of "remarkable and moving" examples of resistance despite tightened governmental control. For instance, when the government's agents of intimidation demand, "What were you doing during the month of demonstrations?" residents of Peking are answering, "I was sick in bed." Peking, Lary explained, was struck at that time by a particularly vicious flu epidemic — an epidemic that has proven to be a wholly effective alibi for protestors who would now be persecuted for their involvement.

And the Chinese, Lary added, are covering for each other: [Yes, I know him — he was sick all month . . . Yes, I know her — she had the flu in May . . .]

Lary also reported that the controversial student leader Chi Ling has still not been arrested and

that no one knows where she is hiding out. "Incredible excitement" surrounds Ling's uncertain whereabouts.

Recently arrested, however, was student leader Wang Dan. Lary said that Dan, affectionately known as "Dan-dan" by the Chinese, has achieved hero status among students and others sympathetic to the ideals of democracy.

Reportedly, executions have been stopped, but Lary could not verify this statement because those recently released from prison have not spoken publicly. Furthermore, arrested demonstrators have not been given access to their relatives — a denial that abuses the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that China signed along with all but a handful of the planet's nations.

American writer Paul Theroux,

in 1986, introduced readers to a popular modern Chinese quip, "We used to believe that 20 per cent of what we heard was truth; now we know that everything we hear is false." This remark still inspires knowing, ironic chuckles in China, according to Lary.

Equally amusing to the Chinese these days is the constantly churning rumour mill concerning Communist party chairman Deng Xiaoping. A student told Lary that he'd heard Deng had \$30 billion locked away in a California bank. A taxi driver insisted that the chairman ate a puppy for breakfast every morning. A number of Chinese people suggested that Deng, in fact, no longer existed. Lary said that the chairman has been reported dead at least four

or five times in the last year.

News of the violent overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania was reported "in a cursory way" by the Chinese media, said Lary. Details of the coup, however, filtered into China by Voice of America short-wave radio broadcasts (the Chinese government has not yet found a way to effectively jam foreign broadcasts). These details were met with joy, Lary said, and letters celebrating the overthrow were sent to the Romanian embassy in China.

Bringing her speech to an end, Lary remarked that the apparent hunger for foreign media systems in China only underscores the "flimsy" nature of the Chinese governmental "machine."

Accord leaves out distinct groups: Filmon

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Constitutional Family was a tremendous achievement for the nation.

Still, Filmon emphasized that the Meech Lake Accord is better known for its flaws.

"It has become a symbol of disenchantment and alienation," he said. "I will not knowingly incorporate a flawed document within our constitution . . . I will not agree to pass the Meech Lake Accord without changes."

The first area of the Accord Filmon attacked pertained to Quebec as a "distinct society." While he agrees that Quebec is indeed a distinct society and, as such, should be recognized in the constitution, Filmon feels that

many groups have been excluded.

He said, "We must ensure that the other groups that make up our nation . . . are not made to feel that they are excluded from their own constitution. It was wrong when it happened to Quebec in 1982 and it is no less wrong if it happens to Northerners, women, aboriginal Canadians, and those of neither French nor English descent."

Filmon also expressed grave concerns about the unanimity provision of the Accord. He said, "I am particularly concerned that the requirement of unanimity could forever prevent the goal of Senate reform from being achieved."

"Given the difficulty we are having presently in our attempts to obtain amendments to the Meech Lake Accord, it is quite possible that the unanimity requirement could bar the Territories from ever achieving provincehood. That is also unacceptable," he added.

In his closing remarks Filmon said proponents of the Accord don't understand the meaning of compromise. He said there are those who believe an "eleventh hour solution" to save the Accord is possible. But Filmon warns that the "eleventh hour" has already arrived and that time is rapidly running out for the Accord to be ratified before the June 23, 1990 deadline.



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