

# New view of 1989 massacre

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leadership on down to the common people realize that nothing's perfect but that they're sort of holding it together and nothing major will happen.

The moment he dies, though, I think there's a potential for everything to be thrown in the air. Everything'll be thrown up for grabs. And if the army is brought into this uncertainty, then there is a very real danger violent actions may be taken.

**How is the government trying to rationalize the army's actions?**

The Chinese continue to insist that every nation should be able to divine its own concept of human rights, and human rights has to be seen in relation to economic and political and social and cultural rights. And that the rich countries of the world are using human rights as a way to beat the backs of third world countries who just can't afford the luxury of the democratic processes that we enjoy.

And there is some argument to be made here. I mean, if people are starving, that is a high priority.

But on the other hand, the only point I'm trying to make in the book is that you don't have to shoot people in order to resolve these sorts of issues. And human rights can and

should be seen in relationship to a large array of political and economic concerns.

What happened in China is really a result of Western imperialism. We have put the third world into a difficult position. It's we who have established a world economic order in which the only thing China has to offer is labour, and labour gets cheaper and cheaper. It's we who design and export the sophisticated weaponry and communications systems that the army uses.

This is not something the Chinese did because they're bad people. We've created a world in which they have done this. And that's a message which I think most reviewers of the book are not going to pay much attention to, but it's something I care a lot about. The book is not to damn China, it's really to ask people to think about the world order.

**Has the international community's condemnation of the event fallen apart?**

It's sort of withdrawn to the sidelines. There's

a minority in the overseas Chinese community that cares passionately about this. But the majority of the Chinese overseas community seems to say, you know, it was a terrible thing, let's forget it, it sort of tarnishes our name as Chinese people, we don't like it but let's put it behind us.

Certain international human rights organizations like Asia Watch and Amnesty International continue to be concerned, of course.

Oh yes, there's something I wanted to say about the Olympics. China knows its international reputation has been badly hurt by the massacre. They're trying to reestablish legitimacy. And so they look to hosting the Olympic games as a way of reestablishing legitimacy.

If the Olympic committee asked me what I should do, I don't know what I'd say. I don't think isolating China is useful. But I think it is useful to be constantly reminding China and any other countries that there are international standards that have to be met.

And these are nothing special. They are conventions that China has signed through the United Nations and they simply have to respect those conventions.

One thing particularly struck me in your book. During the massacre, crowds of people would be shot down by the army, and then they would immediately line up again to throw bricks — in this frenzy, with people dying around them. Almost like a ghost dance.

That's right. People got to a point where they didn't care if they died. They were so overwhelmed that they just didn't care.

I'm thinking of one Western person I interviewed who was there — he's not even Chinese — but he, too was there in the lines. He just couldn't go away. He said: "If I'd gone away I would have compromised something very fundamental to who I am as a person. I couldn't leave, I had to stay there." And he was a foreigner. I think Chinese people felt that even more so.

And this is pretty unimaginable to Canadians. Few of us are ever faced with that kind of situation.

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