

now rather stay overseas. At this life-and-death of the nation's fate, countrymen, please listen to us! . . .

"We have one wish, that the lives of everyone we leave be better. We have one request, that you remember this: our pursuit is life, not death. Democracy is not a task for a few; it takes generations. . . .

"Farewell, father and mother, forgive us that we're being unfaithful as your children; we must be faithful first to our country. . . ."

At any one time, there were 3,000 student hunger-strikers in Tiananmen Square. As the life of each would become threatened, he or she was whisked off to the hospital to be saved, while another took his or her place.

By May 18, Li Peng and his gang met with some leaders from the FBSU and attempted to deter them, by professing concern for the strikers. Wuer Kaixi, who had been released from the hospital to attend the meeting and was still in his pajamas, made clear to Li, "it won't help if all of us at this meeting are persuaded [to leave Tiananmen], because we consist only of one-tenth of a percent of the students in the Square. It's not a matter of subordination to the majority. I believe if there is one single student who decides not to leave, the rest will keep him company."

After futile, patronizing attempts by Li to convince the students he only had their best interests at heart, student Xiong Yan intervened, "Comrade Li mentioned disorder. I want to have three minutes to analyze the simple relationship between disorder and the student movement. When a society or country has upheavals, are they caused by student movements? . . . In my opinion, when a country is unstable . . . students take actions to try to pinpoint what is wrong . . . Any attempt to suppress the student movement, or as we call it the democratic movement, will cause social upheaval. That is a very simple truth."

At this point, Wuer Kaixi fainted, and the meeting was brought to a close. Two days later, Li Peng declared martial law in Beijing. A consummate oligarch, Li Peng's declaration contradicts itself, even within a paragraph, ending with his open threat: "In fact, the hunger strikers are being used as 'hostages' by a few people trying to force the Party and the government to yield to their political demands. These people do not show a single sign of compassion. . . . The student representatives admit that they are no longer able to control the situation; crowds keep pouring into the already-packed Square, shouting their own demagogic slogans. If we fail to end this chaos resolutely and immediately—if we go on tolerating it—it is very likely that we will end up with a situation that none of us would like to see."

On June 4, 1989, the Red Chinese government killed an estimated 4-7,000 people in Tiananmen Square. On June 10, the Ming Pao Publishing House in Hong Kong summarized their views in a statement: "After the darkest night, we expect the light of morning, the dawn. But are we sure that what we have seen is the darkest?"

A look back at Tiananmen Square, and beyond

by Don Baier

Beijing Spring

Photographs by David and Peter Turnley, Text by Melinda Liu, Stewart, Tabori and Chang, New York, 1989
176 pages, illus., paperbound, \$19.95

When I first saw the student demonstrators in the streets of the capital of China, on television a year ago, I was struck by how much they reminded me of the demonstrations of my own youth. This beautifully produced book of photographs reaffirms that impression.

I don't mean to slight the obvious differences with "the Movement" of the 1960s in the United States. No U.S. demonstration was ever crushed as brutally as Tiananmen Square, not even civil rights actions in the South. Hunger strikes weren't popular among American students, and photos of the pitifully cramped and barren living quarters of Chinese students at elite Beijing University make clear the difference in living standards.

And of course, the "Goddess of Democracy" testified more powerfully than words ever could, to the proposition that the Chinese were mounting a "pro-American" revolution, in the sense of the ideals of 1776; whereas by the end of the 1960s, the "revolutionaries" in the United States, claiming to speak for a movement which had started out a decade before in the lunch counter sit-ins and the Freedom Rides where students risked their lives for American principles, had instead taken to burning the American flag, bombing university campuses, and cheering Mao's Red Guards.

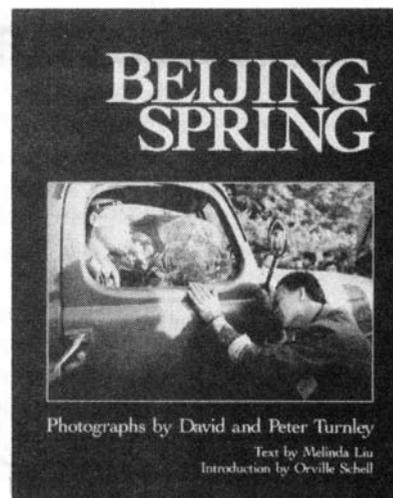
What then, beyond the "Goddess of Democracy," was "American" about the Beijing demonstrations of 1989?

At least some American youth in the 1960s were impatient enough with the obvious immorality of denying black people their civil rights, and of such conduct as Lyndon Johnson's in escalating the Vietnam War, as to react: "Here's an obvious injustice—Let's do something about it, now, today."

So, what began in individual acts of resistance, or as a



Student demonstrators before the military crackdown in Tiananmen Square (left). The cover of *Beijing Spring*, a photographic account of the democracy movement last year in China.



petition for redress of grievances, turned more and more into a direct challenge to institutionalized authority, as the "powers that be" showed themselves unable or unwilling to satisfy the craving for justice.

Beijing Spring documents that process, compressed into a time frame of two months, very well—best of all, because it shows in so many faces acknowledgement of the fundamental revolutionary sensation that one is stepping off the edge of a cliff and is suspended in midair, and the courage one finds in oneself when to turn back is more painful than any physical pain one could suffer.

Of course, a passion for justice and the courage to do something about it do not guarantee appropriate results; one must have a pretty good idea of how to get there. Contempt and defiance of illegitimate authority is no cure-all: certainly

if the '60s in the U.S.A. show anything, after two successive "me generations" spawned by the "'60s counterculture," they show that. President Bush's poll ratings notwithstanding, today the United States is a society so out of love with its leadership and itself that half its eligible citizens routinely don't bother to vote, and nearly 40% of its residents so far, by best estimates, have not even bothered to show up to be counted in the 1990 census; and once again, as in Franklin Roosevelt's time, we can speak of a third of a nation ill-clothed, ill-housed, ill-fed.

This book speaks to our situation. It speaks above all of hope and courage. They are not enough, but without them, nothing can be done. That courage is what the Chinese students had last year, what we Americans have lost, and what we need to find again if we are to have a future.

Books Received

The Drunken Society: Alcohol Abuse in the Soviet Union, by Boris Segal, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1990. 618 pages, hardbound, \$40.

New World, New Mind: Moving Toward Conscious Evolution, by Paul Ehrlich and Robert Ornstein, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990. 302 pages, paperbound, \$9.95.

The Style of a Law Firm, Eight Gentlemen from Virginia, by Anne Hobson Freeman, Algonquin, New York, 1990, 290 pages, hardbound, \$24.95.

Thomas Jefferson: Statesman of Science, by Silvio A. Bedini, Macmillan, New York, 1990. 616 pages, hardbound, \$29.95.

Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam, by William Colby with James McCargar, Contemporary Books, Chicago, 1989, 438 pages, hardbound, \$22.95.

Selling Out, How we are letting Japan buy our land, our industries, our financial institutions, and our future, by Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collings, Contemporary Books, Chicago, 1990, 382 pages, paperbound, \$9.95.

The Long Haul, An Autobiography, by Myles Horton, with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl, Doubleday, New York, 1990, 231 pages, hardbound, \$21.95.

The Jackson Phenomenon: The Man, the Power, the Message, by Elizabeth Colton, Doubleday, New York, 1990, 290 pages, hardbound, \$26.95.