

Twenty years since the Tiananmen Square massacre

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Today marks the 20th anniversary of the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s military repression of the working class in Beijing. While the international media continues to portray the Tiananmen Square massacre as aimed at student protestors, the heavily-armed troops were in fact targetting an emerging nationwide revolutionary movement of urban workers.

The official toll of just 241 deaths, including soldiers, is not credible. The regime at first denied any civilians had been killed. The Chinese Red Cross reported 2,600 dead, but withdrew the figure under government pressure. Independent analysts estimate that up to 7,000 people died, although the actual toll may never be known.

Ignited by student protests for democratic reform in April, the mass movement rapidly spiralled out of official control as the working class raised its own social demands. At least 100 million people in 400 cities participated in protests and demonstrations of one form or another. Along with industrial workers and the urban poor, low-ranking officials, clerks, teachers and even police were involved, driven by their hatred for the social inequality and bureaucratic profiteering that followed Deng Xiaoping's embrace of the capitalist market in 1978.

Over the past 20 years, various Western politicians and media pundits have continued to issue hypocritical statements denouncing the "communist" regime's suppression of "democracy"—all based on the false identification of Stalinism with socialism.

The Maoist regime established in 1949 was never socialist or communist. Its anti-proletarian character was revealed yet again in 1989, when the CCP's peasant-based army drowned the workers' movement in blood. The massacre established the conditions for the Chinese working class to be integrated into the circuit of global capitalist production

as super-exploited cheap labour.

Beijing's own claims to have suppressed a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" are no less false. The shooting of poorly-armed Beijing workers, who used their bodies to resist 40,000 troops armed with AK-47 rifles, tanks and helicopter gunships, was a gigantic advertisement to the Western powers that the Stalinist police-military apparatus would guarantee their investments from any challenge by the working class.

The world's major corporations responded to the massacre with a flood of capital that transformed China into the cheap labour "workshop of the world". China's economy is now 11 times larger than in 1989 and the country is the world's second largest exporter after Germany.

In 2005, when Beijing hosted the Global Fortune Forum of the world's CEOs, the *Fortune* magazine wrote: "The most obvious explanation for this capitalist-communist lovefest is that one party rule gives China's policies more continuity and less silliness than you get in a multiparty democracy... China's government—with its stated commitment to bring in more foreign investment—tends to be more businesslike than most Western CEOs are encountering in their home countries. Corporations are one-party entities too, after all."

Like the "one-party" corporate structures controlled by private owners in the advanced capitalist countries, where workers have no say at all, the CCP runs a jointly-owned sweatshop for global investors, disciplining workers with police-state measures. Any concessions on democratic rights that could allow the 400 million Chinese workers to resist average hourly wage levels of 20 US cents are incompatible with the operations of the global capitalist economy.

Moreover, Beijing's supply of capital, based on the brutal exploitation of workers, has become a critical "lifeline" for US imperialism. Last year, China lent \$400 billion—more

than \$1 billion a day—to the US, recycling its export earnings back into the heavily debt-laden American financial system. A recent Council of Foreign Relations study noted: “Never before has a relatively poor country lent out so much money to a relatively rich country. And never before has the United States relied on a single country’s government for so much financing.”

A recent series of visits to Beijing by top US politicians and officials is testimony to America’s dependence on China. The US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, who once unfurled a banner “to those who died for democracy in China” when visiting Beijing in 1991, made only passing reference to human rights during her trip to China last week. Pelosi did not want to antagonise the US government’s largest foreign creditor.

In the words of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who visited China in February to urge Beijing to keep buying US bonds: “Our economies are so intertwined. The Chinese know that in order to start exporting again to its biggest market... the United States has to take some drastic measures with the stimulus package. We have to incur more debt. We are truly going to rise or fall together.”

Last week US Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner travelled to Beijing to assure Chinese authorities that their \$1.5 trillion in US assets would be safe—through the imposition of savage austerity measures on the American working class.

Just as the global recession has ravaged US consumer spending, it has also decimated Chinese exports and eliminated large sections of China’s manufacturing capacity. With more than 20 million migrant workers thrown out of work and 3 million university graduates unable to find a job this year, the CCP is sitting on a social time bomb.

According to the March issue of the Hong Kong-based *Trend* magazine, the number of labour disputes in China has increased seven-fold to 546,470 since the global financial meltdown last September. In the first two months of 2009, 502 business owners and senior executives were murdered in a wave of violence against business people over unpaid wages and intolerable forms of exploitation.

Amid rising social tensions, the spectre of Tiananmen Square is haunting the Chinese regime. In the lead up to the anniversary, Beijing has taken extraordinary security measures to prevent protests—from detaining dissidents and banning foreign news websites to scheduling a university exam on June 4 to keep students in line. However, none of

the social contradictions that produced the explosion in 1989 has been resolved. On the contrary, they have grown to gigantic proportions.

In the 1989 upheavals, only urban workers were involved. Today, large sections of the multi-millioned rural poor have joined the ranks of the working class and are among its most exploited layers. In the 1980s, most workers were still employed in state-owned industry. Over the past 20 years, large-scale privatisation has destroyed tens of millions of jobs, along with the previous social safety nets of public housing, healthcare and education. Even professional workers are weighed down by constant financial insecurity.

At the other end of the social scale, the CCP has emerged as the party of the capitalist class. In 2002, it opened its doors to private entrepreneurs. Prior to 2002, China had no US dollar billionaires. By 2008, it was second only to the US as the home of 101 billionaires, only five less than 2007, despite the global financial crisis. Today, fewer than 100 of China’s richest 1,000 individuals (with an average wealth of \$US439 million) are *not* members or related to members of the CCP regime.

So far, the CCP’s police-state apparatus has been able to hold together China’s deeply-divided society, especially by preventing revolutionary ideas from entering the country. However, as Leon Trotsky wrote: the laws of history are more powerful than any bureaucratic apparatus. The Chinese working class has been integrated into globalised production over the past 20 years, which has also placed at its disposal the powerful and revolutionary tools of the Internet and electronic communications. This has provided the objective basis for Chinese workers to consciously unify their struggles with their class brothers and sisters around the world in building an international revolutionary movement based on a common, internationalist and socialist perspective.

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