

WSWS republishes ICFI statements on Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989

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Today marks 30 years since the brutal military crackdown on unarmed students and workers in Beijing on the orders of the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership. Independent estimates put the death toll as high as 6,000, with tens of thousands injured, as 40,000 heavily-armed troops, backed by tanks and armored vehicles brutally crushed any resistance by workers and students in Tiananmen Square and working-class suburbs.

While these events are referred to as Tiananmen Square massacre and in the international media students are the main protagonists, the scope of the protests went well beyond the Chinese capital and encompassed broad layers of the working class. The initial student protests in April calling for democratic reforms were rapidly joined by workers and sections of the urban poor who voiced their own class demands against corruption, high inflation and rising unemployment that were the consequences of the pro-market restructuring led by Deng Xiaoping.

By mid-May, protests numbering in the hundreds of thousands were taking place in Tiananmen Square, culminating in a demonstration of two million on May 17. After the regime declared martial law on May 20, a million people flooded the square, while others set up street barricades on the approaches. The Workers Autonomous Union in Beijing, established independently of the CCP regime, was replicated in major cities across the country. According to leaked government documents published as the *Tiananmen Papers*, between April and June 1989, demonstrations were reported in 341 Chinese cities.

“It was nationwide. It wasn’t just one large protest. That’s what made it much more frightening to the government and one reason why it needed to have a show of force,” Jonathan Unger, an Australian National University academic, told the *Guardian* last weekend.

It was not just the scale of the protests, but the shift in their class character, that lay behind the regime’s determination to crush the opposition and unleash a

national-wide campaign of police-state repression to terrorize the entire population. While the CCP leadership had toyed with the proposals of Premier Zhou Ziyang to conciliate more conservative student leaders by offering limited democratic reforms, the regime was alarmed by the entry of the working class into struggle, which threatened its very existence.

Starting today, the *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing a series of statements and comments that document the response of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as well as a seminal article written ten years after the Tiananmen Square massacre and another article assessing the events, 30 years on.

The ICFI statement below, entitled “Victory to the Political Revolution in China,” was issued on June 8, 1989, just days after the military crackdown in Beijing, as protests against the murderous regime were erupting in scores of cities. As well as providing a penetrating insight into the events and the character of the CCP, it provided a political perspective for the Chinese working class on which to fight.

While the US and its allies hypocritically condemned the massacre and equated the CCP regime with socialism and communism, the ICFI insisted that Stalinism, which was in crisis not only in China but Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, was responsible. The statement traces the evolution of the CCP after the 1949 Chinese Revolution, which ended direct imperialist domination of China. Based on the reactionary Stalinist conception of “Socialism in One Country,” the Chinese regime nationalized key sections of industry and implemented bureaucratic centralized planning modelled on the Soviet Union, in which the working class had absolutely no say. The ICFI characterized China as a deformed workers’ state.

In the 1930s, Leon Trotsky insisted that the working class had to defend the nationalized property relations in the Soviet Union established by the Russian Revolution of

1917, despite its degeneration under Stalin and his gangsters. He called for a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy and restore workers' democracy as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution. That was also the political road forward for the Chinese working class in 1989.

The ICFI's statement explained that the fascist-like brutality of the CCP regime stemmed from its acute awareness that capitalist restoration could not be achieved without the suppression of the working class. With great prescience, it warned:

"The consequences of a decisive defeat of the Chinese proletariat by the Stalinist regime—and this has by no means been achieved—would be the complete liquidation of all the remaining social conquests of the Chinese Revolution and the unrestricted reorganization of the economy on new capitalist foundations. Of necessity, the regime presiding over such a counter-revolutionary transformation would be of a fascist character. Indeed, the features of such a regime are already visible, if only in embryonic form, in the military terror that governs Beijing today."

While capitalist politicians shed crocodile tears over the dead in Tiananmen Square, it was understood in Western capitals and boardrooms that the massacre was a guarantee to foreign investors of a cheap, disciplined workforce. In the wake of Deng's southern tour in 1992, foreign investment flooded in, as the entire country was transformed into the sweatshop of the world.

The Beijing regime established stock exchanges, revamped the monetary and banking system, enshrined the right to private property alongside the ability to hire and fire workers, and sold off, looted or shut down state-owned enterprises, and opened the party to wealthy members of the budding capitalist class.

Top CCP leaders boast today of the staggering growth of the Chinese economy, which multiplied 11-fold between 1992 and 2010 to become the world's second largest economy. However, that growth, based on the super-exploitation of the Chinese working class, has come at a heavy price. The regime now confronts problems for which it has no progressive solutions.

The prospect of the peaceful rise of China to become a global power, touted by Deng Xiaoping and his successors, has proven to be a mirage. The imperialist powers, above all the United States, were prepared to coexist with a growing China insofar as it was a source of huge profits and did not challenge their hegemony. However, the Trump administration, with the backing of

Washington's political, military and intelligence establishment, regards China as the chief challenge to US global dominance. The mounting US economic war on China, along with a massive military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific, demonstrates that US imperialism will stop at nothing, including a war between nuclear-armed powers, to block its rival.

Within China, capitalist restoration has generated enormous social tensions. In the space of four decades, the country has gone from being one of the most equal in the world, to one of the most unequal. It has the largest number of dollar billionaires outside the United States, while tens of millions of workers struggle to survive on poverty-level wages. The social evils that were all but abolished in the wake of the 1949 revolution—slavery, child labour, drug abuse, and prostitution—have all flourished under the capitalist market, afflicting the lives of millions.

Thirty years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, CCP leaders maintain the lie that the violent suppression of "counter-revolutionary riot" or political "turmoil" was justified. This year, as every other, the vast police state apparatus is mobilized to ensure that political dissidents are kept under close watch or sent out of Beijing, social media is sanitised, to prevent any discussion of the events, and access to websites critical of the Chinese regime is blocked. Tiananmen Square itself will undoubtedly be flooded with police and plainclothes agents today to ensure any protest is swiftly silenced.

Such repressive measures are not a sign of strength, but of political weakness. The corrupt and isolated Chinese leaders live in mortal fear of the eruption of a mass movement of the vastly-expanded working class on a scale that will inevitably eclipse the upheaval of 1989. The essential political lessons that have to be drawn for revolutionary struggles ahead are contained in the statements and articles being published on the *World Socialist Web Site* this week. They deserve serious study by all workers, youth and intellectuals who want a socialist alternative to war, social inequality and dictatorship. Above all, that means the establishment of a section of the ICFI in China.



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