

WHAT ABOUT ZHAO ZIYANG?

BY WU GUOGUANG

A senior official sympathetic to the 1989 Democracy Movement, Zhao Ziyang now languishes in obscurity and reported ill health under an apparently interminable house arrest. While commemorative activities focus on the civilian victims of the June 4th crackdown, Wu Guoguang asks, What about Zhao Ziyang's human rights?

Certain kinds of basic human rights violations do not easily come within the sight of human rights activists. In some cases, violations are committed against public figures, not the typical disadvantaged individual confronting injustice in society. Nevertheless, violations against these people are no less malevolent and may even pose a greater threat to the universal standard of human rights, the attainment of which is the aspiration of all human rights campaigners. China's former Premier and Chinese Communist Party General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, is one such public figure. While his prominence certainly exceeds that of ordinary citizens, the civil rights violations committed against him have gone largely unnoticed.¹ Perhaps the political weight that he carries overshadows the fact that he is a living, breathing individual who feels emotions of happiness and sadness, just like any one of us.

The truth is that Zhao Ziyang has had no personal freedom since 1989, when he decided to confront Deng Xiaoping over his violent solution of sending tanks to deal with the student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. There can be no doubt that the moral principles that drove an experienced politician such as Zhao to sacrifice the nation's top seat together with his freedom were none other than his profound respect for civil rights and human dignity. Ironically, that is precisely what Zhao lost for himself. Some of the conditions of his house arrest include: the barring of visitors from his residence, except for his immediate family members; the requirement for all visiting relatives to register and temporarily surrender their identification to the guards; all means of communication handled and screened by a government-assigned "secretary"

whose mission is to deny him access to the public; occasional outings with an enormous entourage of minders, and only after the surrounding area is cleared of people and secured by the authorities; and the frequent changing of doctors, with medical records kept so secret that they are not passed from one doctor to the next. In addition, Mr. Zhao and any member of the family who happens to be with him at 11 p.m. are locked inside every night with a bicycle cable lock securing the main entrance, in the same way that Chinese peasants secure their livestock at night.

Over the past fifteen years, the stringent conditions of Zhao's isolation have steadily worsened instead of being gradually relaxed, apparently a result of Jiang Zemin's retaliation against Zhao for writing a letter during the 15th Party Congress in 1998 that urged the authorities to re-evaluate their bloody Tiananmen verdict.²

The Man Jiang Zemin Wants To Erase From History

Zhao Ziyang first received recognition as an experienced provincial leader who had great success in resolving a food shortage crisis while working within the constraints of stringent Mao-style agricultural policies.

When Zhao Ziyang took charge of the nation's economy, it was at a highly volatile and risky moment when the economy was on the verge of collapse. What could be done to stop the calamity? His answer was reform. In the earliest days of China's economic reforms, the enormous difficulty was not merely finding a way to introduce market mechanisms into a planned economy. The real challenge was how to reform a China that was still living in the shadow of Mao. Although the enormous success of economic reform has since transformed the nation, back then there was much confusion and doubt about where economic reform was heading, and it was still common for officials to react with instinctive fear to what had not long ago been considered the "realm of capitalism."

Shortly after Zhao became Premier, perhaps in 1980, a farmer in Lankao County of Henan Province complained to Zhao, "We have great sand-based fields, but the authorities will not let us grow peanuts. Instead, they have ordered us to grow grains. How can we not be poor?!" Zhao carried an insight back to Beijing: "Senseless directives are responsible for making

Chinese farmers poor.” As always, his style was to be accurate, clear and calm, but amiable.

In 1987, the elderly CCP veterans decided to purge Hu Yaobang and make Zhao Ziyang the Acting General Secretary. At first, Zhao ardently refused. “My interest is in economic

reform,” he said. “I’m not the type to be General Secretary of the Party.” But the party elders insisted, and Zhao had no choice but to accept.

At the 13th Party Congress, Zhao was formally appointed General Secretary. At the end of the meeting, he walked into a

Ziyang, Where Are You?

BY QIN XIAOZHOU

Zhao Ziyang (1919-) was named general secretary of the Party in 1987. A firm proponent of economic reform and open foreign policy and an opponent of political repression, Zhao advocated dialogue with the students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square. He was ousted from office on June 23, 1989, and has remained under house arrest ever since.

Ziyang, Ziyang,
Where are you?
Fifteen years ago
In the depths of that evil night
Your Communist army
Opened fire with weapons of war
To slaughter ordinary people and students!
As Party General Secretary over this Communist army
You just dejectedly and
Listlessly withdrew.
“I’m an old man
It doesn’t matter
But you’re still young
You must look after yourselves,”
Those were your parting words.
Perhaps in your heart of hearts
You still clung to the hope:
Heroic students,
Succeed at last!

Ziyang, Ziyang,
Where are you?
In the past fifteen years
There has been no news of you.
Your Communist Party
Is the world’s largest corruption and terrorist ring
Ruling the people with lies and shackles!
As former General Secretary of the Communist Party
Do you ever regret
That you didn’t from the first boldly stand up
And use your power as Party Secretary

To rally the opposition?
Doesn’t the new Party elite
Include your former subordinates and students?
Why don’t they give you a chance to speak?
Why did they without trial
Strip you of your political power
And not even grant you
The most basic personal liberty!

Ziyang, Ziyang,
Where are you?
In the past fifteen years
Why have you remained silent?
Perhaps you have already lost all confidence
In your Communist Party?
Yet, the power of the people
Is like a prairie fire that will reignite with a spring breeze
Jiang Yanyong, Lü Jiaping,¹ the Tiananmen Mothers
Heroically struggle on, even now!
Give us back our Ziyang! Rehabilitate June 4th!
This is the will of the people
The dictatorship must perish, the people must triumph
The people believe in this!
The remembrance day for June 4th will soon arrive
Let’s see when
The voices opposing tyranny
Will bring an end
To this gerontocracy!

Translated by Stacy Mosher

1. Lü Jiaping, a Beijing scholar known for revealing scandals about high-ranking Chinese officials over the Internet, was detained on February 24, 2004. According to a report on Lü’s personal Web site, at least six Beijing public security officers raided his home and confiscated his computer and papers. Lü had reportedly been followed and monitored by public security officers after he posted an article exposing an affair between former Party Chairman Jiang Zemin and a famous singer, Song Zuying. See <http://english.epochtimes.com/news/4-3-16/20359.html>.



Zhao Ziyang outside his Beijing home in June 1998. Photo: Reuters

group of journalists and invited their open questions. One foreign reporter asked him what he planned to do as General Secretary. Zhao replied without hesitation, "Reform: political reform."

Zhao understood the importance of reforming the nation's Mao-style government. His vision went far beyond that of Deng Xiaoping, whose aim was to improve economic efficiency. Zhao was concerned with the long-term institutional stability of the country. He believed that only the establishment of democracy and the creation of positive relations between the people and their government could hope to rule out the possibility of ever having another crisis on the scale of the Cultural Revolution. To this end, Zhao proposed a general plan for political reform.

"We have the same feelings and inspirations as the student demonstrators," Zhao Ziyang said when the students took to the streets of Beijing in 1989. Indeed, the objective of his political reform agenda was essentially no different from the students' demands for more democracy and less corruption.

This is the same man that the Chinese leaders have

attempted to erase from history by isolating him from the rest of humanity while committing blatant violations against his civil rights and their own laws. By doing so, they are hoping to undermine the very moral principles to which this man has so valiantly adhered all his life.

1. A letter to the 16th Party Congress, signed by 192 opposition activists in November 2002, included a demand for the restoration of Zhao Ziyang's political rights and his release from house arrest.
2. The Reuters news agency obtained a copy of Zhao's letter on June 24, 1998, shortly before President Bill Clinton was due to arrive in China for a nine-day visit. Zhao's letter said that the killing of demonstrators on June 4th was "one of the biggest human rights problems this century." Zhao added, "Rather than let it become an obstacle to international relations, it would be better to resolve the June 4 problem ourselves voluntarily." See Steven Mufson, *Zhao Urges Apology for Tiananmen*, *Washington Post* (June 25, 1998).