

From the archives:

Stop Stalinist Terror Against Chinese Workers

**Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International
5 June 2019**

The World Socialist Web Site is posting a series of articles and statements to mark 30 years since Tiananmen Square massacre. The first published on Tuesday was the International Committee of the Fourth International statement issued on June 8, 1989 just four days after the brutal crackdown, together with an introductory explanation.

Today we are republishing the second ICFI statement entitled “Stop Stalinist Terror Against Chinese Workers” which was issued on June 22, 1989. It made an powerful and impassioned appeal to workers internationally to defend the Chinese working class amid mass arrests and public executions aimed at terrorizing the population as a whole. The full extent of the terror has been deliberately suppressed by the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party but subsequent estimates put the number of arrests at 40,000 just in the two months of June and July 1989.

The ICFI statement also noted the hypocritical response of world leaders who, despite perfunctory statements of regret, welcomed the repression of the working class and recognized it as a guarantee that capitalist restoration would proceed. It concluded: “The imperialists have sought and received guarantees that the bureaucracy’s policies of open door to the multinationals, joint-stock companies and the unfettered exploitation of Chinese labor will continue... They predict that with the crushed bones of Chinese workers as a foundation, business will be ‘better than ever.’”

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls upon the working class of every country to mobilize in defense of the besieged workers of China.

The wave of executions, mass arrests and torture unleashed by the Stalinist bureaucracy of Deng Xiaoping constitutes the most ferocious attack on the Chinese proletariat since the bloody days of Chiang Kai-shek. It is no accident that the regime revives the White Terror methods of a reactionary capitalist dictatorship.

With revulsion, workers all over the world are witnessing the face of a bloody bureaucratic counter-revolution in China. This reign of terror is directed at crushing the resistance of the working class to the bureaucracy’s drive to restore capitalism.

The final chapter in this struggle has yet to be written, however. In these first battles with the bureaucratic dictatorship of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese workers have demonstrated unsurpassed heroism and self-sacrifice and they will rise up again to revenge today’s bloodbath with a new revolution against the bureaucracy. This makes the solidarity of the workers of the world all the more decisive at the present juncture.

The independent movement of the working class was sparked by the student protests which began in April. It saw the organization of strikes, demonstrations and the beginnings of independent trade unions. It was this proletarian upsurge which struck panic into the hearts of the ruling

bureaucrats and they have responded ferociously.

On June 21, the Beijing regime carried out the savage murder of three workers, all shot through the head in front of a crowd of 3,000 in the industrial city of Shanghai. The three workers were Xu Guoming, a brewery worker, Yan Xuerong, who worked at a radio factory, and Bian Hanwu, who was unemployed. All three were tried and convicted by a Stalinist drumhead court, without counsel or independent observers. They had been charged in connection with an incident in which thousands of angry workers and students attacked and burned a train after it ran down and killed six demonstrators in Shanghai.

These young workers—blood martyrs in the struggle against Stalinism—are only the first to die in a mounting wave of state killings all over the country. Eight more workers face imminent execution in the capital of Beijing. They were all sentenced to death on frame-up charges stemming from the popular resistance to the troops of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) during the massacre carried out on June 3–4 in and around Tiananmen Square.

And on the same day as the first executions, the Beijing Radio announced that another 45 workers and youth had been sentenced to “death, death with a two-year reprieve, and forced labor, life imprisonment and fixed-term imprisonment” in the city of Jinan in Shandong Province. The sentencing took place in a Stalinist-style show trial attended by 10,000 spectators.

By June 22, the bureaucracy revealed that the number of workers murdered by its executioners had risen to 27. At least seven of those convicted of setting fire to army vehicles during the massacre in Beijing were put to death.

According to official reports, over 1,600 people have been arrested in connection with the antibureaucratic protests which swept the country from April until the massacres at the beginning of June. The real figure is believed to be many times greater. Three weeks after the massacre, the capital and other cities remain under the military’s jackboot, occupied by armor and troops carrying assault rifles.

The Beijing regime claims that it is carrying out this brutal repression in order to stamp out a “counter-revolutionary rebellion” and even to uphold “socialism.” This constitutes the political core of the “big lie” campaign in which the regime has even denied that a single shot was fired in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

The savage crimes of the bureaucracy are the product not of socialism or communism, but of their opposite, Stalinism. The repression is aimed at defending the privileges of the ruling clique, and the profit interests of the class of Chinese capitalists and imperialist multinationals which it has welcomed back into the country.

The current repression is directed at terrorizing the Chinese working class, which came powerfully into: struggle during the May

demonstrations, organizing independent unions, strikes and defense committees and making mighty strides on the road to political revolution against the bureaucracy. It was likewise the workers who led the unequal battle with the combat-equipped troops of the PLA which were sent into Beijing to gun down unarmed demonstrators.

This was confirmed in an account of the massacre taped and smuggled out of China by one of the student leaders, Chai Ling. "The workers of the independent union movement, on the front line around the square, were involved in bloody battles and all died," she said.

Since the military clampdown, the repressive campaign of the Stalinist regime has had the central objective of strong-arming the Chinese workers into submission. Workers have been frog-marched before the television cameras in what is known as the "airplane" position; their heads forced down in a bowing position with their arms twisted behind them by a soldier on either side. Their faces are bruised and bloodied and their clothes in disarray from obvious beatings and torture.

In an article entitled "Terror against Workers in China," the French newspaper *Liberation* described the scene at a recent "trial" in Changchun, the capital of Jilin province: "The 26 condemned men, with their heads shaved and a sign around their neck, giving their name, their workplace and the crimes of which they are accused (participation in the demonstration or spreading 'rumors'), were exhibited on the stage of a cinema in front of hundreds of spectators..."

This relentless drive to brutalize and humiliate the Chinese workers, to beat them into submission, resembles nothing so much as fascism and exposes the bureaucracy as the mortal enemy of the proletariat and socialism.

In one imperialist country after another, the execution of workers in China has been dismissed with the most perfunctory and hypocritical statements of "regret," which, in the language of diplomacy, mean full agreement and approval. Meanwhile, corporate executives are getting ready to rush back to China to profit off the exploitation of labor forced to work at gunpoint.

In Washington, President Bush refused any comment on the executions. Secretary of State Baker declared that the White House "deeply regrets" the executions, but quickly added that US imperialism has "an important relationship here which we should seek to preserve." He dismissed further questions, declaring he was "late for lunch." British Prime Minister Thatcher pronounced the shooting deaths of the three workers "out of proportion to the crime," thereby making clear that British imperialism recognizes opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy as a "crime" and fully supports the ferocious punishment of the working class.

The repression in China is being carried out in the direct interests of the imperialists. In attacking the Chinese workers, the bureaucracy is acting as their agent, seeking to restore "labor discipline" and to repress the mass opposition of the working class to the policies of capitalist restoration and the rampant exploitation and social inequality which it has engendered.

This was underscored by the coldblooded statement of a Western diplomat in Shanghai, who told the *New York Times*: "My guess is we're going to enter into a stage of heavy intimidation to make sure people go back to work and stay at work. They've already killed a couple of thousand people, so what's a couple of thousand more? You've got to look at it from their perspective."

Imperialism gloats over the broken bodies of the Chinese workers, seeking to exploit them for the purpose of crude anticommunist propaganda, while at the same time calculating that the brutal state repression will translate into higher rates of exploitation and even greater profits from the tens of billions of dollars worth of direct investment and joint ventures already operating on Chinese soil. Its sole fear is that the Chinese workers will rise again in revolutionary struggle against the procapitalist bureaucracy.

In countries like Indonesia, Chile, South Korea and dozens of others, the imperialist powers have carried out the same methods now being used by the Chinese Stalinists. Death squad murders of union leaders, fascist violence against workers and summary executions have all been employed repeatedly to guarantee the property and profits of the imperialists. The bureaucracy's bloody work in China today has the very same purpose.

Moreover, every one of the imperialist countries have themselves had ample experience in the massacre of Chinese workers—from the Opium Wars, to the Boxer Rebellion to their support of Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary armies—and do not shrink from a similar bloodletting on their behalf today.

The real attitude of American capitalism was summed up in a *New York Times* interview with the head of the China desk at the US Commerce Department, where the government attempts to coordinate the activities of some 300 US multinationals with operations in China. "Basically we're telling them to sit tight ... and see how things shake out," the Commerce Department official Christine Lucyk told the *Times*. The June 20 article further revealed that the department was closely monitoring the return to "normalcy" at Chinese ports, factories and post offices, though it revealed that the port of Shanghai was still shut down. The main concern of this imperialist listening post—and of the corporations which it serves—is if the Deng Xiaoping bureaucracy will prove successful in crushing the movement of the working class.

The capitalist press, meanwhile, has begun publishing reports revising downward the estimates of the death toll in the Beijing massacre and questioning the eyewitness accounts of Chinese students. Under conditions in which the bureaucracy has silenced all accounts of the recent events except its own, this can mean only that the bourgeois media in the US and elsewhere is responding favorably to the "big lie" campaign of the Beijing regime.

This is a media, it should be recalled, which manufactures images of the world to suit the needs of imperialist foreign policy. Just as it has routinely invented atrocities out of whole cloth to justify US aggression against countries like Libya and Nicaragua, so today it helps cover up the atrocity which occurred in Beijing to aid the US-backed drive for a "return to normalcy."

Sir Eric Sharp, the chairman of Cable & Wireless, a telecommunications conglomerate with extensive interests in China, spoke for British imperialism, telling the *Financial Times* of London that corporate executives should avoid "precipitous and emotional action" in relation to the events in China. "Sir Eric said that the Chinese wanted economic order and stability," the *Times* reported.

The imperialists have sought and received guarantees that the bureaucracy's policies of open door to the multinationals, joint-stock companies and the unfettered exploitation of Chinese labor will continue. Among themselves, they are comparing the massacre in Beijing with earlier bloodbaths like the South Korean dictatorship's crushing of the Kwangju rebellion in 1980, in which thousands died. They predict that with the crushed bones of Chinese workers as a foundation, business will be "better than ever."

Autoworkers should take note that Chrysler has already made the decision to send all of its executives and staff back into China to run its joint venture Jeep plants there. Meanwhile, other US-based multinationals like Hewlett-Packard, Corning Inc., Dow Chemical Co., Philips Petroleum Co. and Atlantic Richfield Co. have simply transferred their US personnel to offices in Hong Kong, from which they continue to direct the companies' China operations via telecommunications. Most are expected to fly back to Beijing within the next few weeks.

While the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a US agency which insures overseas corporate investments, has written policies on 29 ventures in China, none of the corporations have moved to file for

damages. The imperialist bourgeoisie is confident that capitalist property relations will continue to expand in China and fervently hopes that by drowning the rebellion of the working class in blood, the bureaucracy will inaugurate a period of “labor stability” and superprofits.

For its part, the Beijing bureaucracy has assured the imperialist powers that the repression will only further its policy of capitalist restoration. “Can China return to a dosed policy?” the *People’s Daily* editorial asked in its June 16 edition. “Deng Xiaoping has clearly pointed out: our basic proposals from our development to our planning policies, including reform and openness, are all correct.

“They are not even enough; even reform and openness have not gone far enough,” the editorial declared.

Chinese Stalinist officials have issued repeated statements that the open door policy will be expanded, foreign investments protected and private property given an even greater role. They have openly told the multinationals that now is the best time to invest in China, in the wake of the crackdown.

The battle lines in China are clearly drawn for every class-conscious worker the world over to see. The Chinese proletariat is locked in a bitter struggle against a corrupt and ruthless bureaucracy, which employs the methods of police-state dictatorship as an agency of world imperialism and in defense of its policies of dismantling the nationalized economy and restoring private property and capitalist exploitation.

The Trotskyist movement has warned again and again of the *counter-revolutionary* role of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the deformed workers’ states. The path-breaking analysis made by Trotsky of the Soviet bureaucracy led by Stalin in the 1930s is no less applicable to China and the other deformed workers’ states today. Trotsky admonished those who claimed that the Soviet Union had achieved socialism. Rather, he insisted, the Soviet Union was a transitory regime, neither socialist nor capitalist. On the basis of this analysis, he advanced the prognosis that either the bureaucracy would overturn the nationalized property relations and throw these countries back into capitalism, or the working class would overthrow the bureaucracy and pave the way to socialism, whose victory would ultimately depend on the outcome of the international struggle.

All manner of Pabloite revisionists and petty-bourgeois opportunists repudiated this analysis, endowing the bureaucracy with some sort of progressive historical role. Today these same forces act to cover up the socioeconomic source of the bureaucracy’s repression of the working class in its drive to restore capitalism. By denying its historically counter-revolutionary role, these forces—both those who condemn the massacre in the name of abstract democracy and those who endorse it as a necessary defense of “socialism”—all serve as apologists and accomplices for the Beijing regime and its bloody crimes.

The Resolution on the Soviet Union, presented at the 1938 founding convention of the Socialist Workers Party, which was then the American Trotskyist movement, outlined the fundamental political contradictions which have explosively emerged in the China events:

“The present crisis in the Soviet Union is not only terribly witnessed by the executions, imprisonments, and exiles, but is deeply characterized by them. The wiping out of the entire revolutionary generation, occurring simultaneously with the complete deprivation of all democratic rights of the masses and the sanctification of the Bonapartist regime of absolutism, has been carried through by the Stalinist bureaucracy with the deliberate purpose of creating all the political preconditions for a fundamental assault upon the economic basis of the workers’ state, namely, the nationalization of the means of production and exchange. Just as the revolutionary proletariat, in seizing power in 1917, created the political conditions for the expropriation of private property, so the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy, by consummating its dispossessing of the proletariat from political power, has created the political conditions

for the destruction of nationalized economy and the restoration of private property.

“The Soviet bureaucracy is not a class, nor is the labor aristocracy upon which it relies. But both contain the elements of a new, i.e., a capitalist class. The evolution of the Stalinist bureaucracy represents a long process of shifting from one class base to another. Under the pressure of its world imperialist allies, of the labor aristocrat and the bureaucrat, of the factory director and the well-to-do farmer, the Stalinist bureaucracy not only seeks a new class base under its political domination, but must inevitably seek to establish the economic foundation for such a new class. This can mean nothing else but an intensified drive in the coming future to wipe out the socioeconomic foundations of the workers’ state” (*The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party, Minutes and Resolutions 1938–39* [New York: Monad Press, 1982, pp. 136–37]).

These tendencies revealed in the bloody bureaucratic regime of Stalin—the Moscow Trials and the murder of genuine communists—50 years ago now find their most advanced expression not only in China, but in Poland, the USSR and all of the deformed workers’ states. The bureaucracies must turn ruthlessly upon the working class, using savage state violence to create the political conditions for plunging these countries back into capitalism.

In China, the working class has taken its first steps on the road of political revolution. It is driven by its hatred of a bureaucracy, which assures itself luxury and property at the expense of the masses; which guarantees the interests of foreign capitalists, while attacking the gains of the 1949 revolution and which introduces massive social inequality as it seeks a new class base for its rule within the strata of capitalist exploiters which it has brought forth in China.

The bloody methods of Deng Xiaoping and the ruling clique are the methods of a Stalinist bureaucracy which has embarked upon the restoration of capitalism. It is no accident that in Moscow, the Gorbachev bureaucracy has voiced its solidarity with the infamous crimes against the Chinese proletariat. Gorbachev declared only that the Soviet Stalinists “regret some aspects of what has happened,” while expressing general agreement with the course taken by Beijing. For its part, Radio Moscow described the mass arrests as an indication of the “normalization” of the situation in China. The Kremlin bureaucracy knows full well that its own restorationist policies of *perestroika* are creating the conditions for a revolutionary explosion within the Soviet working class, and it is prepared to use the same bloody methods as its counterparts in Beijing.

All those Stalinist and petty-bourgeois forces around the globe who defend the crimes of the Beijing bureaucracy are themselves miserable lackeys of imperialism. Their claims that by murdering workers the bureaucracy is upholding socialism is a vicious lie, exposed by the procapitalist policies of the Beijing leadership and the complicity of world imperialism in the bloody repression. What these forces hate and fear is the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, which is coming into mortal conflict with its old Stalinist, social democratic, bourgeois nationalist and trade union bureaucratic leaderships in every part of the world.

By fighting for the political revolution against the bureaucracy, the Chinese workers are marching shoulder to shoulder with the world proletariat in the struggle to put an end to imperialism and all its agencies. That is the “crime” for which they are today paying with their lives.

Workers of every country must rally to the defense of the Chinese working class in the name of international socialism. They must reject the anticommunist hypocrisy of the imperialists and recognize that only by fighting for the overthrow of their own ruling class can they strengthen the workers of China in their struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the establishment of a genuine workers’ democracy and socialism, as a decisive component of the world socialist revolution.

The international working class must defend the embattled workers of

China by mobilizing its own independent strength.

Mass demonstrations and pickets should be organized at Chinese embassies and missions in every country, demanding an end to the state repression and the immediate release of all the imprisoned workers and students.

The union movement in every country should organize a boycott of all shipping to China. No supplies for the bloodstained Stalinist dictatorship of Deng Xiaoping and the imperialist concerns which it defends in China! Solidarity strikes should be called at plants of capitalist firms operating in China.

Full support must be given to the struggle of the Chinese workers to organize unions and factory committees, independent of the control of the pro-imperialist bureaucracy.

Within China and internationally, the indispensable condition for this uniting of the struggles of the world proletariat is the building of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

- * **Defend the Chinese Working Class!**
- * **Down with the Bureaucracy's White Terror!**
- * **For the Political Revolution against Stalinism!**
- * **Forward to the World Socialist Revolution!**
- * **Build the International Committee of the Fourth International!**

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