

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
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**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

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**Questions**

**Could you please compile a simple 1-2 page summary which covers the following:**

- 1. Background to the unions variously translated who formed in April 1989**
- 2. Why that date chosen – commemorated 4/5/1919?**
- 3. Crackdown in June 1989 – briefly what happened to the activists?**
- 4. Whether someone detained in June 1989 would still face ill treatment on that basis if he returned some 18 years later?**
- 5. Anything else of relevance.**

**RESPONSE**

**Summary of material**

**The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 – Crackdown in June 1989**

The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, also referred to as the 1989 Democracy Movement, were a series of demonstrations led by students, intellectuals, and labor activists in the People's Republic of China between 15 April 1989 and 4 June 1989. While the protests lacked a unified cause or leadership, the demands included an end to official corruption, political and economic reform and even a democratic system. The demonstrations centered on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, but large-scale protests also occurred in cities throughout China. The demands drew wide public support and millions joined peaceful demonstrations as the movement gained momentum in Beijing and throughout China. (Amnesty International 1999, *People's Republic of China: Ten Years After Tiananmen*, ASA 17/07/99; Black, George & Munro, Robin 1993, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, John Wiley & Sons, New York.)

## **1. Background to the unions variously translated who formed in April 1989**

Various groups of students and workers began to form protest organisations from the middle of April 1989, such as the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation. These groups mushroomed throughout the country and the Shanghai Workers Autonomous Federation was reportedly formed on 17 May by Cai Chaojun. By the end of May, independent labor organizations had sprung up spontaneously in numerous other major cities in China, including Shanghai, Nanjing, Changsha, Xi'an, Hangzhou, Guizhou and Wuhan. This posed a formidable challenge to the Communist Party authorities. (Black, George & Munro, Robin 1993, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, pp.145-9, 226; Asia Watch, 1990, *Punishment Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law*, Human Rights Watch, New York pp.37-40, 123.)

## **2. Why that date chosen – commemorated 4/5/1919?**

Large demonstrations were held all around China, including in Shanghai, on 4 May 1989. 4 May is a significant day in China as it commemorates the May Fourth Movement when students had demonstrated in 1919 in favour of science and democracy. This movement is also credited as a forerunner of the Chinese Communist Party. For these reasons it is also Youth Day in China. 4 May 1989 marked the significant 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May Fourth Movement (Landsberger, S., 'Chronology of the 1989 Student Demonstrations', 1990, from *The Chinese Peoples' Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (CX158793); Forward, Roy 1991, 'Letter from Shanghai', in *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the provinces*, ed. Jonathon Unger, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp.191-2).

## **3. Briefly what happened to the activists?**

Starting on the night of 3-4 June, the government launched a military crackdown on the protesters which left many civilians dead or injured. Following the violence, the government conducted widespread arrests to suppress protestors and their supporters, cracked down on other protests around China, banned the foreign press from the country and strictly controlled coverage of the events in the PRC press. Members of the Party who had publicly sympathized with the protesters were purged. Many activists in the protest movement received prison sentences of two to 15 years; others were imprisoned without their names or sentences being made public (Amnesty International 1999, *People's Republic of China: Ten Years After Tiananmen*, ASA 17/07/99; Black, George & Munro, Robin 1993, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, John Wiley & Sons, New York; Asia Watch 1990, Asia Watch, 1990, *Punishment Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law*, Human Rights Watch, New York; Unger, Jonathan (ed.), 1991, *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney; Asia Watch, 1994, *Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners*).

## **4. Whether someone detained in June 1989, would still face persecution on that basis if he returned some 18 years later?**

As early as 1994, DFAT advised that "Many of the pro-democracy activists from the Tiananmen period and those who have returned have been allowed to become involved in trade and economic pursuits without hindrance from the government. The government seem to have drawn a clear line, in that they welcome participation in economic development but ban any attempt by returning dissidents to engage in political activities." Similarly, DFAT

noted in 2002 that “As far as we are aware, the likely treatment of Tiananmen-era returnees would depend to a large degree on their behaviour on return, as well as on the nature and extent of their involvement in protest activities abroad. Individuals who took a leading role in protests overseas would likely be monitored by local public security authorities on return (provided, of course, that they were aware of the individual’s return). Official interest would be ongoing if those authorities assessed that an individual was likely to continue political agitation while in China.” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1994, *Cable BJ 7550 – RRT Request: Current treatment of dissidents*, 28 September; DIMIA Country Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No. 61/02 – China: Treatment on return of demonstrator* (sourced from DFAT advice dated 12 March 2002), 13 March.)

## List of Sources Consulted

### Databases:

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. Amnesty International 1994, *Human Rights Violations Five Years after Tiananmen*, ASA 17/20/94, June.
2. Amnesty International 1999, *People’s Republic of China: Ten Years After Tiananmen*, ASA 17/07/99, May
3. Black, George & Munro, Robin 1993, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China’s Democracy Movement*, John Wiley & Sons, New York. (RRT Library 951.05 BLA)
4. Asia Watch, 1990, *Punishment Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law*, Human Rights Watch, New York. (RRT Library 323.490951 PUN)
5. Unger, Jonathan (ed.), 1991, *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney. (RRT Library 320.951 UNG)
6. Asia Watch, 1994, *Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners*, February. (RRT Library 323.490951 ASI)
7. Landsberger, S. 1990, ‘Chronology of the 1989 Student Demonstrations’ in *The Chinese Peoples’ Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989*. (CISNET China CX158793)
8. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1994, *Cable BJ 7550 – RRT Request: Current treatment of dissidents*, 28 September. (CISNET China CX3018)
9. DIMIA Country Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No. 61/02 – China: Treatment on return of demonstrator* (sourced from DFAT advice dated 12 March 2002), 13 March. (CISNET China CX62843)