

Standing Up for Freedom in Tiananmen Square

The Communist government of China has traditionally been authoritarian. It has used propaganda to justify its policies and prison labor camps to enforce them. In spite of these measures, Chinese leaders have not always been able to control the people.

In the late 1980's, a worldwide movement for greater political freedom took place. Eastern European countries began to free themselves from Communist dominance. Chinese leaders, seeing that this movement was gaining followers in China, banned political demonstrations. They stopped the reforms that had allowed for somewhat freer economic activity.

By 1988, the Chinese people began to react against the new political restrictions and economic regulations. University students began to make demands for greater freedom.

On May 17, 1989, a peaceful demonstration took place in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Other citizens flocked to support the students until more than a million people had gathered in the square.

Threatened by the large numbers of protesters, Chinese leaders declared martial law. When soldiers and tanks arrived to clear the square, the unarmed protesters stood their ground. The photograph demonstrates their courage. Here a single man stands blocking a file of tanks.

For two weeks, the arm hesitated to attack the defenseless people. Early on June 4, however the tanks entered the square. The soldiers killed hundred of the protesters. After the attack on the square, police tracked down and arrested many of those who had escaped. They were put on trial and sent to prison. In spite of the disapproval of democratic countries, the Chinese government made its policies even more repressive.



Review Questions

1. How did the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe influence the leaders of Communist China?
2. How did the Chinese people react to the imposition of new political restrictions?
3. How does the photograph illustrate the bravery of the protesters?
4. What was the result of the demonstration in Tiananmen Square?