

# 'Down with Li Peng' now heard in Moscow

by Mary M. Burdman

Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng, the man who ordered martial law in Beijing last May to crush the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, arrived in Moscow on April 22 for a state visit with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov. Li arrived very soon after the first anniversary of the massacre of nationalist demonstrators in Tblisi, Georgia on April 9, 1989, and in the midst of the Soviet efforts to crush Lithuanian independence.

Thanks, not to glasnost, but rather to the growing national unrest inside the Soviet empire, Li was greeted by several hundred demonstrators at the Foreign Ministry in Moscow protesting his visit, the first time that a demonstration against such a high-level official guest in Moscow has ever been allowed. The demonstrators included 22 members of the Moscow City Council, who also introduced a motion to the council denouncing Li's visit.

The demonstrators chanted "Down with Li Peng!" like those in Tiananmen Square last spring, and carried banners reading "Yesterday China, today Lithuania, tomorrow Moscow." They were organized by the Moscow Students Club, the Russian Popular Front, and by the organization set up by the late Dr. Andrei Sakharov, Memorial. A representative of this organization, speaking in East Berlin at the first joint conference of the Chinese exiles' group, the Federation for a Democratic China, and the East German New Forum on April 21, announced the anti-Li Peng demonstrations. He described how Dr. Sakharov was cut off in his speech to the Soviet Chamber of Deputies denouncing the butchery in Tiananmen Square last June, by none other than Gorbachov himself, who is now greeting Li Peng. In Moscow, a student announced a one-day hunger strike in Red Square for May 13, the anniversary of the first hunger strikes in Beijing. It is also the anniversary of Gorbachov's visit to Beijing last year.

The demonstration in Moscow was not the only evidence of the upheavals in both the communist giants surrounding this summit, the first visit of a Chinese prime minister to the Soviet Union since Chou En-lai was there 26 years ago. In the far western Chinese province of Xinjiang, reports say as many as 80 people have been killed by Chinese forces after the Turkic-speaking Uighur Muslims began a revolt April 5-6. Tensions have been very high in Xinjiang, which is still predominantly Muslim despite heavy immigration of Han Chinese to the province, and there have been violent protests at the universities.

The situation is of strategic importance for China: Xinjiang borders on the Soviet Muslim republics of Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, and Kirghizia, as well as Afghanistan and the troubled province of Kashmir, divided between Pakistan and India. Xinjiang is the site of China's nuclear testing facilities and the source of critical raw materials.

There is no doubt that the crisis in Xinjiang was on the agenda between Li Peng and Gorbachov, because the provincial governor, Tomur Dewamat, accompanied Li to Moscow. There have been bloody protests in the Soviet Muslim provinces through the winter, sparked by the desperate economic situation left by decades of Soviet looting. Beijing's policy toward Xinjiang and the other interior provinces, including emphatically Tibet, has been the same. The economic gap between east and west China has worsened dramatically in the past decade, as the west has been forced to sell its raw materials to the east at state-set prices that have meant billions of yuan in losses to the region every year. Under the Deng Xiaoping "reforms," government and foreign investment has been concentrated almost exclusively in the eastern coastal provinces, leaving the interior impoverished.

## Empires in crisis

The Soviet and Chinese leaderships are attempting to consolidate a working relationship as they both weather internal political and economic storms. While the communist giants' relations, including military, have been greatly strengthened in the past months, much of this seems aimed at keeping relations stable while each empire tries desperately to cope with economic collapse. European analysts report that the Soviets fear—with good reason—another political explosion in China.

The summit resulted in an agreement in principle to reduce military forces along their common border. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman quoted Li Peng that the two countries had made steady progress in political relations and talks on the demarcation of Sino-Soviet border were also in progress.

Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and his Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen, signed a broad agreement for the reduction of armed forces and for military confidence-building measures along the 4,380-mile Soviet-Chinese frontier, and Li and Gorbachov signed a number of agreements, including a long-term program for economic, scientific, and technical cooperation until the year 2000. Li told Gorbachov that China would continue reforms but would guard against "instability."

But ironically, as the *Financial Times* pointed out April 25, these plans may amount to little. Trade between the two nations fell below the target of \$3.1 billion agreed to in March by \$700 million, and was even lower than the 1988 figure. Indeed, China's exports to the Soviet Union seem to be expanding most in one field—labor. Thousands of Chinese are being sent over the border to work in Siberia.