

Monday, April 23, 2007

From Tiananmen Square to the capitalist road.

Â Image from Bureau of Engraving and Printing's website.Â On June 3, 1989, I was about to go to sleep before going to my younger brother's high school graduation the next morning. The television news reported on the Tiananmen Square massacre that had taken place. The news reports were just coming in, and apparently in the process of being clarified and detailed. Having no Internet for getting more information, I went to bed with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. Â The next morning I watched the news to learn how massive, extreme and brutal had been the massacre. I felt even sicker. Â I saw Norman Mailer at the graduation, and thanked him for sharing his writing with the world. I could have talked to him about the massacre, but felt relief enough that he was there. Â I returned to Washington, DC, where I was preparing for the bar exam. After lunch with two law school friends, we passed by the Chinese embassy, where I saw a lone demonstrator standing before the lady liberty statue that had been standing in a park near the embassy. I asked the driving friend to let me off there, because I decided to join the lone protestor. They advised caution about getting into trouble. What trouble was I supposed to fear, demonstrating peacefully so shortly after the massacre? Â The lone demonstrator was originally from China, and a local college professor in the United States. (Addendum:Â Â After receiving my request for permission to identify this professor, he gave me the go-ahead. He is Gallaudet University Math Department Chair Fat C. Lam.) His sign read "Don't let tyrants sleep." I stood with him; I forget if I made a sign, and if I did, it would only have been on the legal pad I had with me. The Secret Service uniformed officer told me he supported our message, but that he would arrest me if I entered the embassy building to express my grievances. I stayed around an hour or longer with the lone demonstrator. Â Out of my deep sadness over the Tiananmen massacre came hope from learning that such Tiananmen leaders as Li Lu had escaped safely, and exhilaration at meeting Mr. Lu at a 1989 Washington, DC, reception sponsored by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now called Human Rights First). The following June 1990, I joined a long massacre anniversary demonstration march supporting the Tiananmen Square activists, which ended, appropriately, before the Chinese embassy. Â Even with the intervening explosion of the Internet and capitalism in China, the government there has managed to continue to keep a tight grip over dissent subsequent to the Tiananmen Square massacre. Whether or not the Tiananmen activists are biding their time until the iron is hot for them to re-enter the political arena in China, or just enjoying the capitalist opportunities in the world, I recently obtained the following updates on Tiananmen leaders Li Liu and Shen Tong:Â Li Lu obtained multiple degrees fromÂ Columbia University, and became an investment professional. Shen Tong became a high-tech capitalist, who now visits China to sell his software products; his sister believes he is not fixated on making big money. Â Hopefully the spark of hope,Â optimism and human rights keeps LiÂ Lu, Shen Tong, and the other surviving Tiananmen Square activistsÂ ready to turn in their business suits -- at least temporarily, when the iron isÂ hotÂ -- to push further for more democracy and individual libertiesÂ in China.Â Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:20