

A burning desire to make Beijing listen

SIX years on, about 20,000 people turned out in Victoria Park on Sunday to commemorate the tragic events in Beijing on June 4, 1989. This is an impressive figure, not least because that was also the night for the Miss Hong Kong beauty pageant.

Despite the passing of six years more than 20,000 people chose to remember those bloody events which took place thousands of kilometres away. Are they right to do so?

There are those who in their wisdom advise that it is best for Hong Kong to, if not forget, at least refrain from remembering so ostentatiously. It does no one greater harm than Hong Kong.

The territory's support of the demonstrators then, by mass rallies, by moral and financial support, by word and by deed, had already earned Beijing's enmity.

Such enmity had manifested and is continuing to manifest itself in a much more stringent policy towards Hong Kong.

We cannot remove the mistrust, it is said, but we must do nothing more to aggravate it, if we want a smooth transition.

In the years in between, this kind of wisdom has translated itself into more concrete suggestions, such as the suggestion that leading figures of the Hong Kong Democrats - Martin Lee, Szeto Wah and others - should distance themselves from the Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China.

If they want to survive as political leaders beyond 1997, if they want to minimise their chances of being bumped off the through train, they must establish a dialogue with Beijing, and they cannot hope to do so as long as they are branded "subversives".

And so for a few years this was supposed to be the dilemma confronting these gentlemen: how not to betray their electorate who gave them their votes precisely because of the stance they took on the June 4 events, while recanting to a sufficient degree to woo back the grace of the Beijing leadership. It is not surprising that they did not get very far.

Events show how naive such wisdom invariably is.

For, even if the people of China can forgive the wrongs that were done them, the Beijing leadership will never be able to forgive the Chinese people for the wrong that they brought about, the acts which the government was forced into doing, they would say. As Deng Xiaoping's daughter so recently told the American press, Mr Deng had no alternative to suppressing the disturbance by military force. That is how they see those events.

Adroitly and increasingly successfully, the propaganda machinery of Beijing has shifted the focus away from the violence itself to the reasons



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why suppression was necessary or at least inevitable.

The ultimate logic demands that the leadership, and not the massacred, were the real victims.

In this equation, the Hong Kong masses who supported the demonstrators can only be the real culprits. Our support forced the suppression, is the short answer. So how can we be the ones to forgive or forget? We will never be forgiven until we have written our confessions.

In any event, any subtle or blatant dissociation from the June 4 events on the part of the Democrats would have been wasted. There is not going to be any through train anyway. Now we know Hong Kong people are never going to be allowed to govern Hong Kong.

Nor is there ever going to be any real democracy. At best, some dissenting voice will be allowed in the government structure. It is going to be a regression to the rubber-stamp days. If we are going to have any local political leadership at all, what we need, more than ever, is a leadership which is not afraid to resist and oppose in the course of safeguarding the rights and interests of the people of Hong Kong.

The years in between have been sobering. The millions who poured out to demonstrate in support of the democratic movement in Beijing six years ago might have done so more on impulse than in reason. But the 20,000 last Sunday lighted their candles with knowing eyes.

In the intervening years they have learnt that much of what they at first took for granted was factually mistaken. They have learnt about the complexity of the motives of those involved. They have learnt that there were no gods but only mortals who led the movement.

They have seen how student leaders, stars in those dreadful days, have fallen in exile. Yet they have kept their candles burning. They have kept their candles burning because they know that the true picture which has emerged confirms even more strongly that it was a massacre of the defenceless which took place in the streets of Beijing; that it was a deliberate suppression of a peaceful demonstration by the armed forces at the command of a leadership fully in con-

trol; that if there was any "necessity" to suppress the demonstrators, it was the necessity of those in power to kill to ensure that their power remains unquestionable.

More than ever they are convinced that China's political system must change, and that they want it to change for the good of the Chinese people.

If they repent of anything, it is their undue optimism that they repent of; for naively believing that Li Peng would fall, for example; and for believing that the leadership in Beijing would give in and allow more democracy in the government just because it was so dramatically obvious that it was the wish of the people. And also for believing that the sympathy of the international community would make a difference.

In the intervening years they have seen how economic considerations continue to win, that unpleasant as it may sound there is great truth in the leadership's cynical confidence that economic self-interest will turn the tide for them before long, internationally or inside China, among the once perceived victims.

Economic liberty and political control continue to thrive as Beijing's policy - and apparently with glowing success. Hong Kong's significance, both economically and strategically, continues to dwindle - and with it its bargaining power.

The rallying call last Sunday - "remember June 4, transcend 97" - was, therefore, not so much ironic as courageous. Remembering June 4, Hong Kong faces the 1997 transition with its eyes open, knowing all the hardship ahead. But it is not out of mere bravery that they continue to insist on the rehabilitation of June 4 as a patriotic movement and not a subversive disturbance.

If they persist, the day may yet come for this to come true; for rehabilitation has happened before. If and when that takes place, the Hong Kong people and their democrat leadership will be rehabilitated by right. That, difficult or distant as it may appear, is the only hope.

Compromise, on the other hand, is worth less than nothing, at this point even more so than any other, to the Beijing leadership, as a bargaining chip or for any other purpose. People who have no power must all the more depend on righteousness.

It is cynically and contemptuously believed by people in China that Hong Kong people are a corrupt lot. All they want it to be assured that "dancing will go on in the dancing halls and racing in the racecourse as usual".

Give them Miss Hong Kong, they say, and they will let June 4 be. But no. At least not for 20,000 of us. It is only by removing the cause for contempt that Hong Kong can, one day, make Beijing listen.