

Lost in the Chinese Gulag

By CLAUDIA ROSETT

China's purge caught up with scholar Li Honglin at his home in the southeastern city of Fuzhou, on Friday, July 7, just about noon. Mr. Li was sitting down to a family lunch he never finished. While two relatives watched, 10 policemen entered Mr. Li's home, seized his manuscripts and address books, and escorted him to the jeep in which they took him away. Since then, Mr. Li's family has had no word from him except brief notes saying that he is all right, and has been taken to Beijing. Even the Fuzhou authorities at the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, where Mr. Li was president in the mid-1980s, say they don't know his precise whereabouts.

Mr. Li is one of thousands hauled off to the Chinese gulag since the June 4 massacre of democratic protesters in Beijing. His tale is "a summary of the Chinese people," as one person close to him puts it.

Long lists of Chinese patriots now in the gulag can be had from organizations such as Asia Watch, Amnesty International and various expatriate-Chinese watch groups. Of dissidents known to the West, at least 30 have been executed, hundreds are in prison, and hundreds more have disappeared—whether jailed or in hiding we do not know. Officially announced arrests number at least 2,500; UPI recently estimated the total at some 10,000.

To focus on a few of these tragedies is to see that the June 4 battle for Tiananmen Square was only the first volley of the latest repressive onslaught by China's Communist Party. It is also to get a hint that though the recesses of the Chinese gulag may lie farther from Western thought than the Soviet camps and prisons witnessed by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for the Chinese they are immediate, menacing and packed with some of the country's bravest democrats.

Li Honglin

Mr. Li is a party member who for years worked for peaceful reform within the communist system. A reporter for a Western newspaper who saw him earlier this year says he was "full of hope" for China.

Born in Manchuria in 1925, Mr. Li joined the Communist Party in his early 20s, before Mao Tse-tung's 1949 revolution. Schooled as an economist, he taught for a while in the city of Lanzhou, then moved to Beijing to work as a researcher and adviser to the party's Central Committee. In the late 1960s, during the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Li was sent into rural exile in northeastern China. There he was forbidden to do scholarly work; he and his family survived the next few years by raising ducks and chickens and gathering dried grass for fuel.

Resurrected as a scholar in the mid-1970s, Mr. Li eventually returned to a research post in Beijing. A theorist known for his books such as "The Four Isms," he argued that China needed more freedom and democracy. When Deng Xiaoping be-

gan liberalizing China's command economy in the late 1970s, Mr. Li was one of the first to suggest an incentive system for workers. According to one person who knows him well, he liked to say, "It's not the people who should be loyal to the leader, but the leader who should be loyal to the people." In 1986 Mr. Li was a visiting professor at Princeton University. That year he published in the Chinese press an article in which he summed up his views on China's politics: "No Democracy, No Modernization."



In February, shortly before demonstrations for democracy broke out across China, Mr. Li was among the intellectuals who signed a petition asking for the release of political prisoners. This act earned Mr. Li a mention in a now-infamous speech delivered June 30 by the mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong. In his speech, Mr. Chen described the development of China's 1989 democracy movement. Virtually all the leaders he named have by now been arrested, gone into hiding, or fled into exile.

Liu Xiaobo

There is, for example, 34-year-old Liu Xiaobo, arrested June 6. Mr. Liu is a party member who worked as a lecturer in the Chinese literature department of Beijing Normal University. He is married and has a young son. Some of his acquaintances abroad describe him as a thin, chain-smoking individualist, who likes to stay up late and wears his shirts untucked over faded jeans. They say he is "witty," has "terrible table manners," and is "very loyal to his friends."



Mr. Liu was spending this year as a visiting fellow at Columbia University in New York. When the recent democratic revolt began in China, he flew back to Beijing, and became one of the more prominent demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, where he was among those who faced the soldiers during the final June 4 army attack. He escaped Tiananmen, only to be picked up two days later by plainclothes security officers who knocked him from his bike on a Beijing street and took him away in a white minivan. Chinese authorities have since accused Mr. Liu of "counter-revolutionary" activities, for which he may yet face a death sentence.

Bao Tong

Among the reformers fallen from grace

is the former chief policy adviser to Zhao Ziyang, Bao Tong. The 56-year-old Mr. Bao, a member of the party's central committee, was appointed in January to head the Communist Party's Political Reform Research Center. Mr. Bao put his trust in the party's ability to reform itself. This was the message of a speech he allegedly wrote, and Zhao Ziyang delivered, to reassure delegates at an Asian Development Bank session held May 4 in Beijing's Great Hall of the People while demonstrators marched toward Tiananmen Square just outside.



For publicizing the speech, Mr. Bao was denounced in the Beijing mayor's June 30 peroration: "This speech ... prepared by Bao Tong beforehand ... created serious ideological confusion among the masses and the cadres, while inflating the arrogance of the organizers and plotters of the turmoil." Mr. Bao is reported by various human-rights organizations to have been under arrest since June 3.

Cao Siyuan

Another liberal leader who vanished into the gulag is Cao Siyuan, a 43-year-old social scientist. Mr. Cao went to the market for groceries the day before the army occupied the capital and didn't come back. According to an Amnesty International bulletin, "He is reported to have been arrested in the afternoon of 3 June in Beijing."

Mr. Cao is a short, plump, energetic man with thick round glasses, rumpled suits and hair sticking out in all directions. A party member who has held a series of jobs as a teacher and political researcher, Mr. Cao was appointed last October as director of the Stone Research and Development Institute, a liberal research outfit affiliated with one of China's most successful companies, the quasi-private Stone computer group. Over the past few years Mr. Cao served as a policy adviser to the recently deposed party secretary, Zhao Ziyang. Mr. Zhao backed some of the protesters' demands for reform on May 19, and has not been heard from since.

Starting in the late 1970s, Mr. Cao had been urging China's government toward a series of crucial reforms. In 1979, he suggested loosening up the state ownership system. In 1980 he began pushing for laws that would allow companies to go bankrupt—and so encourage more efficient production. Over the past two years he had proposed that China's legislature, the National People's Congress, become a genuinely democratic branch of government instead of a rubber stamp for the Politburo.

When Premier Li Peng declared martial law for Beijing starting May 20, Mr.

Cao and some of his colleagues at the Stone group looked for a way to peacefully resolve the confrontation. They circulated a petition calling for a special meeting of the NPC's standing committee in the hope that the committee might overturn the martial-law declaration. Mr. Cao, cheerful right up to his disappearance, told one reporter in late May that he didn't think the strategy would succeed, but it had to be tried. The proposed NPC meeting never took place, instead, Mr. Cao was arrested. Another colleague who worked on the petition drive, 42-year-old Stone economist Zhou Duo, was detained July 10, according to Asia Watch. Stone's president, Wan Ruman, has fled China and is currently in the U.S.

Dai Qing

Of the writers dragged off these past few months, the most prominent is a woman in her early 40s, Dai Qing, a columnist for the Guangming Daily, a party member who grew up as the adopted daughter of prominent party members, she was privy to many inside stories of high cadres. One friend recalls her tale of what it was like to watch Mao Tse-tung dance stiffly and in straight lines until he bumped into something. An exuberant woman with a broad smile, Ms. Dai made her reputation by publicizing the true accounts of episodes erased by the party from China's official history—such as the tale of a group of Trotskyite cadres slain in the 1950s. "She knows the dirt and will publish it," says an acquaintance.



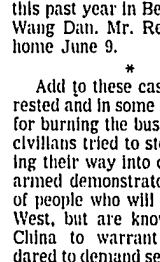
During the final days of the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, Ms. Dai led a drive to persuade the protesters to disband peacefully. This left some dissidents in doubt of her real loyalties. The party apparently had its doubts too. Amnesty International reports that on July 14, according to Ms. Dai's husband, plainclothes police arrested Dai Qing, searched the couple's apartment, and seized her manuscripts. She has not been heard from since.

Ren Wandong

Finally, there's the case of Ren Wandong, the 45-year-old founder of the China Human Rights League. Mr. Ren took part in the Beijing Spring democracy movement shut down by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, and served four years in prison for his efforts back then to liberalize China.

Last year he began again to speak out. On Dec. 26, 1988, Mr. Ren published an article in the New York Times, in which he wrote that "the opening trend in China

has become irreversible," and criticized the party as corrupt and unresponsive to the people's needs. In the Beijing mayor's speech of June 30, he was named as one of the pro-democracy speakers who "spread a lot of fallacies" at a "democratic salon" run this past year in Beijing by student leader Wang Dan. Mr. Ren was arrested at his home June 9.



Add to these cases the "hooligans" arrested and in some cases already executed for burning the bus barricades with which civilians tried to stop soldiers from shooting their way into crowds of peaceful, unarmed demonstrators. Add the thousands of people who will never be known to the West, but are known well enough inside China to warrant arrest because they dared to demand self-government. Add the name of Wei Jingsheng, serving his 10th year of a 15-year prison sentence because in 1979 he explained clearly why China needs democracy to become a modern nation.

Add the weird spectacle of China's best-known dissident, physicist Fang Lizhi, a wanted man now besieged along with his wife inside the American Embassy in Beijing. Asked earlier this year about the extent of the Chinese gulag, Mr. Fang told a friend that no one can know its full reach. But everywhere in China, he said, you hear stories of it.

Ms. Rosett is editor of The Asian Wall Street Journal's editorial page.