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China

Mourn Liu Xiaobo, Free Liu Xia – “A martyr, a man of great moral courage”

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We hold the CCP government responsible for Liu Xiaobo’s premature death. No one should be thrown into prison, let alone left to rot there, simply for exercising the right to free speech. The CCP even went so far as to intervene in Liu’s family’s arrangements for his funeral, scattering Liu’s ashes into the sea without the genuine consent of Liu’s wife, Liu Xia. It is even more outrageous to see the regime continuing to hold Liu Xia under house arrest, just to make sure that Liu’s legacy cannot be visible. Anyone who still thinks that the CCP government somehow carries some degree of a “socialist legacy”, as certain “new leftists” do, should think again. What we have now in Beijing is one of the most barbaric far right regimes in the world. It is this regime which should be tried by the people.

One only needs to compare how the KMT treated its most well known and daring opposition leader in the 1930s with the present day CCP. In 1932 the KMT tracked down and arrested Chen Duxiu, the once head of the CCP, which by then had already abandoned the cities for rural guerilla warfare. Although Chen was expelled from the party, he was still seen as a serious threat to the KMT. Therefore Chiang Kai Shek initially wanted to send Chen to the military court for trial so as to deal with his opponent freely. But the news spread and a national initiative to support Chen Duxiu, which included KMT celebrities, such as Soong Ching Ling, Bai Wenwei, Cai Yuanpei, etc, followed. Chiang Kai-shek had no choice but to send Chen to court for trial. Cai Yuanpei immediately found a famous “public intellectual”, Zhang Shizhao (later an obedient scholar under Mao), to be Chen’s lawyer. Then, in court, the prosecutor accused Chen of “advocating the idea of ‘down with the Kuomintang’ hence amounting to overthrowing the Republic of China.” Zhang Shizhao stood up and said that Chen Duxiu was no longer a member of the the Communist Party and had formed his own group, the Left Oppositionist, which had nothing to do with the CCP’s guerilla warfare, and he was therefore effectively helpful to the Kuomintang because of this. Chen Duxiu immediately stood up and declared, “Zhang’s defense only represents his own personal view. As to my political view one should only rely on my documents!” Then he read his own defense, openly admitted that he remained a revolutionary, even though this might lead to him being sentenced heavily, including receiving the death penalty.

What is worth noting here, was that in the KMT era in the 1930s, instead of all the party leaders and members either standing behind the top leader to condemn Liu Xiaobo or remaining silent, quite a few big KMT names openly came to the aid of Chen to help him to get a fair trial. In contrast to the CCP’s kangaroo’s court, the KMT had to arrange a real open trial for Chen, and because of this the court hearing and cross-examination was fully reported in the newspapers – owned not by the party but independently; some of them were run by public intellectuals who sincerely believed in free speech. In contrast, there is not a single newspaper in today’s China that is independent. That is why, while Chen’s indictment against the KMT was fully covered by the press, Liu Xiaobo’s public statement that openly declared that the CCP “is not his enemy” was still censored in CCP China. Actually, the KMT also treated Chen in prison better than the CCP’s ill treatment of Liu. Although thousands of revolutionaries died in KMT prisons, at least it treated Chen well. He was able to meet his wife regularly in private and for long enough to exceed the official time limit. In the end, although Chen was released in 1937 and was able to immediately throw himself into the struggle against the Japanese invasion and to criticise the KMT’s half-hearted defensive war, Liu died in custody and his wife remains practically a prisoner.

The KMT in the 1930s was actually quickly evolving into a fascist regime. It was not anything close to a “benevolent absolutism”. But comparing how it treated Chen with how the CCP has treated Liu and many others, one can still tell the difference. Sadly, there are progressive people in the world today who believe the otherwise.

That said, it is also a bit of an exaggeration when someone declares that Liu is a great democratic thinker. He is a martyr and as such a man of great moral courage and will be remembered. But Liu is not great as a democratic

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thinker. Politically he repeatedly exhibited naivety and self-contradiction. It is to his credit that he promoted liberal democratic ideas which led to his imprisonment and death there. But he was also a strong advocate of the privatization of state owned enterprises and farm land, and one may wonder how democratic this would be. He was known as an advocate of non-violence, but actually the picture is more complicated. He whole-heartedly supported Bush's war against Iraq in 2003, and condemned the UN for not endorsing the US-UK's war, praising the duo as “representing the regime of freedom and benevolence”. The fact that Liu was offered the Noble Peace prize is comparable to an effort to trying to square the circle. But let us not be harsh to Liu now, because it was neither Liu himself who claimed to be “great thinker”, nor did he intervene to make the Norwegian Noble Committee give him the prize. It is the responsibility of those people who wish to use Liu. Right now we should continue to focus on demanding Beijing free Liu Xia. We should consider launching an international boycott of Chinese bureaucratic capital so as to press the CCP to respect basic human rights and especially to release Liu Xia. Let us mourn Liu Xiaobo and stand by Liu Xia.

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