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1,000 Chinese Journalists Call For Greater Freedom of Press

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** MAY 10, 1989

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In the strongest appeal so far for freedom of the press in China, more than 1,000 journalists from official news organizations signed a petition that was presented to the Government today calling for talks with China's leaders.

The goal of the talks would be to discuss independence of the press, broader coverage of major events like the recent student demonstrations, and the dismissal of the editor in chief of a Shanghai newspaper.

"The reason we are calling for such a dialogue is that our press coverage has attracted criticism at home and abroad," said Li Datong, an editor at the China Youth News. "We think that the press in Beijing has failed to be comprehensive and fair in its coverage. And we think this is the direct result of our current press system."

The petition, which was presented to the All-China Journalists Association by about 100 journalists, criticized press censorship in coverage of the recent student demonstrations and demanded a change in the Communist Party's role in press coverage. 'Some Reports Were Distorted'

"Some reports of the demonstrations were extremely distorted and they have severely damaged the reputation of China's press both here and abroad," the petition said.

Because domestic news organizations have been restricted in their coverage of the demonstrations, many Chinese people have learned of the recent events from foreign reports, such as those on the Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

During the big student protest last Thursday, about 300 reporters from leading publications demonstrated at the headquarters of the official New China News Agency. Several newspapers also printed articles, albeit brief ones, on the event the next day.

"We saw more than you did, but you wrote and published more than we did," Yuan Xiaolu, a journalist at China Youth News who signed the petition, told a foreign reporter.

Several reporters said they did not know whether their newspapers were going to publish articles about the petition today. But a reporter at the Science and Technology Daily, which was forced to delay distribution of an issue recently because it included articles about the demonstrations, said the newspaper planned to cover the event.

The single action that seems to have aroused the greatest dissatisfaction among journalists is the dismissal two weeks ago of Qin Benli, who was the editor in chief of China's boldest newspaper, the Shanghai-based World Economic Herald. Mr. Qin, 70, seems to have become a symbol of the need for more press freedom.

Journalists for the newspaper said the authorities have again intercepted the Herald and delayed its publication. They said officials refused to allow the current issue of the weekly newspaper to be printed because of a front-page letter declaring Mr. Qin's dismissal improper. The letter was removed and the newspaper was printed 36 hours late, they said.

Zhang Weiguo, a reporter in the Herald's Beijing bureau said the staff members also intend to sue the Shanghai Communist Party leader for his decision to dismiss Mr. Qin and reorganize the newspaper.

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