

China: Slowdown and Crackdown - Sharper repression against the labor rights movement

Sunday 6 March 2016, by [Against the Current](#), [SONG Julia](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2016).

AS CHINA'S ECONOMY slows down, it appears that worker discontent is growing and the regime is responding with sharper repression against the labor rights movement. The movement's activities are legal under Chinese law, but always under threat when they become effective.

Under a system where the "official" trade union functions essentially as a government front, small organizations defending workers' rights are viewed by the regime and employers as threats that could become seeds of an independent labor movement.

According to a report by Julia Song in *Epoch Times*, January 12 [[1](#)]:

"Four labor rights activists based in Guangdong Province were formally arrested on January 8, marking another round of the Chinese regime's tightening crackdown on dissent. The individuals were detained over a month ago, but only now formally arrested for alleged crimes of 'gathering crowds to disturb social order.'

"The punishment of the activists comes as protests by unpaid workers increase as China's economy slows. Many factories have closed or relocated recently, also, putting a strain on workers.

"Three of the arrested individuals — Zeng Feiyang, Meng Han and Zhu Xiaomei, a young mother who was breastfeeding her one-year-old daughter when she was detained — are from the Panyu Workers Center. They were arrested on December 4 last year, along with He Xiaobo of the Nanfeiyan Social Worker Center. He was charged with 'embezzlement.'

"Cheng Zhunqiang and Yan Xin, lawyers of Zeng Feiyang and Meng Han, said they were informed of the arrests on Friday by prosecutors in Guangdong. They said the reasoning behind the charges was not given.

"Zeng Feiyang is a well-known rights activist in China; his NGO was involved in mediating labor disputes at the Lide shoe factory in December 2014. Tang Qinghong, a workers' representative, told *Financial Times* Chinese that they 'would have gotten nowhere without the help of the Panyu Workers' Group.'

"Authorities may have a different opinion. Xinhua, the state mouthpiece, published an article on December 22 last year charging Zeng and six fellow rights activists with 'accepting financial support from overseas organizations' and 'inciting workers to assemble a crowd and stir up trouble.' Official media called the NGO an 'illegal organization' that 'tramples on workers' rights.'

"Xinhua also engaged in character assassination against Zeng, claiming that he sought to 'visit prostitutes' in China, and that he somehow had 'at least eight mistresses,' as a married man.

"Zeng's last post in late October, on his verified Weibo account, shared a post from an Internet user about a successful protest by environmental workers in China. It said: 'Collective resistance, worker representatives, and negotiation between labor and capital are the three core factors in this

instance, essential for workers to defend their rights.”

A petition campaign to free imprisoned Chinese activists has been launched by China Labour Net. To sign the appeal and learn more about the campaign, visit:

<http://www.worldlabour.org/eng/node/734>.

P.S.

* From Against the Current n° 181, March-April 2016:Retour ligne automatiqueRetour ligne automatique

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/4583>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1939721-four-chinese-labor-activists-are-formally-arrested/>