

# Joint Statement: We Demand the Unconditional Release of the Liaoyang Two Workers' Leaders

Tuesday 6 November 2018, by [Movements \(Hong Kong\)](#) (Date first published: 18 June 2003).

**12 June 2003, nine Hong Kong organizations held a demonstration to call for the release of Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang.**

On 9 May 2003, two workers' leaders from the city of Liaoyang in northeast China were handed down long prison sentences. Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang were sentenced to seven and four years respectively on charges of 'subverting state security' for their role in a four-year campaign against corruption at the now bankrupted Ferroalloy Factory. We cannot remain silent at this use of state apparatus to persecute the leaders of peaceful workers' protests against injustice, and in defence of their jobs.

To date, we have collected over 2053 signatures from trade unionists and supporters in Hong Kong along with thousands of signatures from unionists all over the world via the Internet. Thousands of people across the world are calling on the Chinese government to unconditionally release Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang.

On the day of the sentencing over 300 workers from the Ferroalloy Factory gathered in a silent show of support for their representatives and in protest against continuing government repression. As if preparing for the arrival of a powerful enemy, the Liaoyang government had earlier sent over 300 police officers to seal off the area and stop supporters from getting into the court. The courtroom itself was packed with government officials and police officers. The only supporters who were allowed in to witness the proceedings were the two daughters of Yao and Xiao accompanied by two women workers. Reporters, observers and fellow worker representatives were all denied entry. The two accused were not allowed to make any statement following the announcement of the sentences. As they attempted to leave the courtroom after the sentencing, the two daughters were separated and bundled into police vans. Another group of police officers violently restrained Xiao Yunliang's sick wife as she tried to stop them taking her daughter away. She was left unconscious and had to be taken to hospital for emergency treatment.

Xiao Yunliang's daughter Xiao Yu said that her father appeared to be almost blind in court. While over a year in custody has devastated the two men's physical health, it has not broken their spirit or sense of conviction. Following the announcement of the sentence, Yao Fuxin, who is only in slightly better health than Xiao, encouraged Xiao to get to his feet: "We must stand up together." We won't allow them to mock us!"

Xiao Yunliang, physically weak and in great pain, rose to his feet.

In this way, the two worker's leaders, who have suffered so much violence and oppression, used the only means left to them to express their scorn at those who would brand them as criminals. In this

manner, they expressed the aspirations of the Chinese working class towards their persecutors: Worker's unity is not a crime. Chinese workers will not be intimidated!

Falsely charging workers' representatives with criminal acts along with the beating of ordinary citizens by police officers is certainly not unusual in the province of Liaoning. On 30 March 2003, a gas explosion at the Mengjiagou coal mine in Dasiping town near the city of Fushun in Liaoning, killed 24 miners. When Yan Mingfang, the wife of one of the dead miners, travelled from her home in Sichuan province to demand that the Dasiping authorities discuss compensation and related matters, she was beaten up by the police. Journalist Jiang Weiping was stationed in northeast China, working for the Hong Kong daily newspaper Wenhuibao. In 1998, he wrote three articles for a Hong Kong political journal criticising Bo Xilai, former mayor of the flagship city of Dalian and later promoted to the post of Liaoning governor. The articles also revealed corruption among Liaoning officials and their widespread use of public office for private gain. As a result he was sentenced to eight years in prison and the deprivation of his political rights for five years.

All the signs point to the fact that it is the Liaoning provincial government that is behind the persecution of workers' leaders in Liaoyang. During the reform of state-owned enterprise, the provincial authorities have demonstrated over a long period of time their scorn for even the most basic rights of workers. Liaoning was designated a pilot province for social security reforms by former Premier Zhu Rongji, yet there are serious question marks over what governor Bo Xilai has actually achieved. Coal miners in Fushun were forced into a compensated redundancy scheme that gave miners just 300 yuan for every year worked. Under this arrangement, miners who had put in up to 30 years at the coal face were kicked out with less than 10,000 yuan in compensation. After paying pension and medical insurance premiums, the miners were left with nothing. The relatives of dead migrant workers at the Mengjiagou mine had no option but to accept paltry and insulting compensation. Miners employed by the Fushun Coal Bureau were likewise left with no choice but accept the equally insulting redundancy arrangements put to them. If workers, such as those at Liaoyang Ferroalloy Factory, organise to protect their legal rights, their representatives are arrested and imprisoned. It is a stark choice of accepting oppression or fighting back. The Liaoyang workers chose the latter and took part in a sustained struggle against corruption.

We have noted that China's new leadership, appointed during the recent National People's Congress, has demonstrated a considerably more accessible style of leadership. Premier Wen Jiabao has visited coal mines, factories and farmers households in an attempt to demonstrate that the Chinese government has the confidence and support of the people. The new leadership has also tried to unite the country in a battle against SARS. Yet, as demonstrated by the case of Jiang Weiping, the Liaoning provincial government has carried on with the stock tricks of persecution. They have not hesitated to split Liaoning society and, in the process, created widespread distrust, even hatred. Their imprisonment of Liaoyang workers' leaders who have exposed their corruption and incompetence is no more than an act of revenge. Again, we ask, what does Liaoning Governor Bo Xilai actually think he is achieving?

In the light of the Liaoyang government's criminalisation of Yao Fuxin's and Xiao Yunliang's legitimate attempts to organise workers at the Ferroalloy Factory, we remind the Liaoning provincial government leaders of China's present reality. To date, China has been the country hardest hit by the SARS virus and we have a public health system that is incapable of dealing with a countrywide epidemic. In a situation marked by a serious lack of resources and capacity, the only policy open to the government is to rebuild public confidence and attempt to unite the country in a fight to beat SARS and stop its spreading. Yet the Liaoning government has simply used this crisis as an opportunity to sentence workers' representatives while domestic and international attention is focussed on SARS. This cynical opportunism will only further shake an already minimal level of public trust in the authorities and is a genuine example of 'subverting state security', the very crime

that Yao and Xiao have been found guilty of.

We reiterate our demand for their unconditional release.

We appeal to the central government to take note that the corruption in which China is mired has led to unprecedented level of workers' rights violations by government officials. It has given rise to a nationwide sense of indignation and anger. The prison sentences served on Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang, who are 'guilty' of nothing more than exercising workers' rights to organise, will have a negative influence on the entire country and will further weaken any remaining sense of trust between the government and the working class.

We believe that the campaign of the Ferro-Alloy Factory workers against corruption and the negotiations that Yao, Xiao and other representatives entered into with the government prior to their arrest are the expression of legitimate workers' rights. The right to organise and the right to collective bargaining are not only enshrined in International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 and 98, but are also guaranteed under Article 35 of China's Constitution. The persecution and oppression that has been visited on workers in Liaoyang is an attack on all workers in China. It also demonstrates the disdain they hold for the international labour movement which they have directly challenged by sentencing the two local workers' leaders to long prison terms. We in Hong Kong will redouble our efforts to gather support from the international labour movement for the Liaoyang workers' struggle against the violation of their rights that has arisen from the corrupt links between government officials and business circles in Liaoning. We will also call for the censure of the government's behaviour at the ILO's annual conference currently taking place in Geneva.

### **China Labour Bulletin**

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

Asia Monitor Resource Center

Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee

Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese

April Fifth Action

Hong Kong Christian Institute

Globalization Monitor

Hong Kong Alliance In Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China

*Sign our joint signature campaign with LabourStart*

- "We Demand the Unconditional Release of the Liaoyang Two". China Labour Bulletin, 18/06/2003: <https://clb.org.hk/en/content/we-demand-unconditional-release-liaoyang-two>
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## **Hong Kong Trade Unions and NGOs Demonstrate:**

Press Release

12 June 2003

On 12 June 2003, nine Hong Kong organisations took part in a demonstration to demand the immediate and unconditional release of the two imprisoned Liaoyang labour rights organisers, Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), China Labour Bulletin, the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Globalisation Monitor, April Fifth Movement, Hong Kong Christian Institute, Hong Kong Commission for Justice and Peace and the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China were among the nine organizations which took part in the demonstration, held outside the China Liaison Office (CLO) in Hong Kong. It was hoped that the CLO would accept a petition calling for Yao and Xiao's release signed by almost 3,000 people in Hong Kong and worldwide.

Approximately thirty protestors gathered outside Hong Kong's Western District Police Station at 12 noon and marched the short distance to the CLO. The police prevented the demonstration from proceeding to the main entrance of the CLO and would only allow marchers to gather at the rear entrance, where a spokesperson for the groups, Zheng Qingfa, read out a collective statement demanding the unconditional release of Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang.

The CLO refused to send a representative to accept the signatures. Along with placards and trade union banners, the signatures were consequently taped to barriers blocking off the entrance. Before dispersing, we again stated our solidarity, emphasising that NGO groups and HKCTU affiliates stand side by side with their brothers and sisters on the Mainland.

The struggle in Liaoyang is far from over and yesterday's action is just one link in a chain of protests that reaches right up to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva. We will continue our fight until all Mainland and Hong Kong workers enjoy the rights to freedom of association, free collective bargaining, and free speech, freedom of publication and freedom to demonstrate.

On 4 June, a global street and internet signature campaign calling for the unconditional release of the Liaoyang Two and supporting their struggle was launched by China Labour Bulletin in conjunction with the London-based labour news website LabourStart. To date, almost three thousand signatures have been collected. One of the aims of the protest was to hand the signatures over to the CLO director, Gao Siren, and request that he pass them on to President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Bo Xilai, the governor of Liaoning province

The statement and signatures will be sent to the central government in Beijing as well as to the Liaoning provincial government. CLB representative Han Dongfang is currently attending the ILO's annual conference in Geneva. On 13 June he will deliver a speech to the ILO Workers' Group condemning the Chinese government's repression of the workers' movement in China and calling on the international community to show their concern for the Liaoyang Two.

• China Labour Bulletin, 18/06/2003:

<https://clb.org.hk/en/content/hong-kong-trade-unions-and-ngos-demonstrate>

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