



China: Radical left students harassed, threatened

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Left-feminist student group dissolved by force and members facing harassment, arrest

In November 2017, police in China stormed a left-wing student reading group at the Guangdong University of Technology where eight students were arrested and jailed on trumped up charges. Since then, their families have been harassed and intimidated. Sun Ting Ting – the only woman released on bail – has been forced to report into police station, and in February 2018 she was violently removed from a train when attempting to travel to Beijing.

With students playing a crucial solidarity role in supporting labour rights in China, this is being understood as part of a broader attempt to shut down engagement with progressive, political ideas that could damage the economic interests and policies of the State.

Over the past five years in China, feminists campaigning against sexual harassment, bloggers highlighting social justice issues, trade union organisers as well as striking workers have increasingly faced arrest and imprisonment. While organised political activities that build connections among different groups across China have been continually under attack, student reading groups have been protected by freedom of speech laws until now. Activists and groups from across China are calling for solidarity in ensuring these arrests and the intimidation of students do not continue to occur under the shroud of secrecy.

Eight participants of reading groups who have been arrested or are in hiding have written letters to the public this year sharing their poetry and aspirations with the world. Since November, another reading group has been stormed by police with students arrested. Join us in demanding that all charges against the students are dropped, and that the crackdown on progressive reading groups ends immediately. Stand united with our friends in China in defending the right to read.

While Sun Ting Ting was serving her 28 days in prison, she wrote:

“In serving the underprivileged, I came to realize that public interest work is the best way to help underprivileged workers and peasants at the bottom of society to live with dignity.

"I can see that in this world, exploitation and oppression have never disappeared."

Students like Sun should be supported, not arrested, for their commitment to social justice.

Zhang Yun Fan, another one of the arrested students, has long been committed to supporting workers' rights: in 2015, he mobilised 61 students from 19 university departments to investigate and expose the labour exploitation being faced by the university's cleaning, construction and service staff. This report was ground-breaking in shifting public awareness on the labour rights of service staff, but also marked the beginning of years of intimidation directed towards Zhang. He says, "reading groups and volunteer activities have spared my life the monotony caused by poverty".

I swallowed this industrial sewage, these unemployment documents
Youth stooped at machines die before their time
I swallowed the hustle and the destitution
Swallowed pedestrian bridges, life covered in rust
I can't swallow any more
All that I've swallowed is now gushing out of my throat
Unfurling on the land of my ancestors
Into a disgraceful poem.

Student Y

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P.S.

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