

# China - Why did Foxconn Workers' Protests in Zhengzhou Happen: The Seven Evil Deeds of Foxconn, the CCP and Apple

Saturday 14 January 2023, by [LIU Xiang](#) (Date first published: 14 January 2023).

**Note: The Chinese original article is [here](#). Through carefully reviewing the whole processes of the protests the author indicted the collusion between the Foxconn, the CCP and the Apple being responsible for the horrible situation which led to the outbreak of the protests.**

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In late October 2022, people found on Chinese social media that a large number of workers were fleeing from Foxconn's giant factory in Zhengzhou, Henan Province. Due to the COVID epidemic in this factory, these workers' Health Code were turned red or yellow by the government, which meant they were unable to take public transport and factory workers in China rarely have cars. In order to go home, they had to walk tens or even hundreds of kilometers in the countryside or on the highway. This event is considered as Foxconn Incident 1.0.

As the professional media and civil society in China and abroad followed up, this event became top news in early November - there were even petitions and protests overseas in solidarity with Foxconn workers. Foxconn and the Zhengzhou government began taking measures to 'put out the fire' at the end of October. For example, Foxconn issued a 'four-point statement' on October 30 to claim that it was taking care of its workers in the Zhengzhou factory; the local government sent some working group to the factory; and the Epidemic Prevention Headquarters of Zhengzhou Airport District, where the factory is located, stated on the 31<sup>st</sup> demanding Foxconn to resume production and factory life in an orderly manner. Foxconn Incident 1.0 came to an end then, as no new turmoil was exposed under the public's attention at this stage.

However, just as the hotspot was fading away, Foxconn Incident 2.0 suddenly broke out on November 22: workers revolted inside the factory, and the police suppressed them with walloping, high-pressure water cannons and tear gas. Because of the attention accumulated by Incident 1.0, Incident 2.0 was almost presented to the public in the form of live webcast. However, the revolt was quickly quelled with the arrival of detachments of the CCP's Armed Police Force and the management's agreement to the demands of the protesting workers.

These two incidents were not isolated, but the different stages of one struggle; they were not accidental, but the inevitable result of the collusion between the regime and capital during the epidemic; and they were not the end, as the subsequent 'White Paper Movement' aimed at the same evil deeds. The purpose of this article is to justify the resistance.

### **One: Lies about Omicron**

In order to cooperate with the CCP's giving up of the Zero-COVID Policy, its propaganda machine made a major shift in reporting Omicron. An [article](#) in *People's Daily* on December 6 gives an example the new tune: 'Upper respiratory symptoms are predominant after infection with the Omicron variant, mainly manifesting as throat discomfort and coughing. The patients without symptoms and with only mild symptoms account for about 90% or more, the patients with symptoms of pneumonia are no longer common. The proportion of seriously ill patients (requiring high-flow oxygen therapy or receiving non-invasive or invasive ventilation) is even smaller.'

However, a [report](#) in the same newspaper two months ago gave a different story: 'If epidemic prevention and control measures are relaxed, it will inevitably result in a large number of people being infected in the short term, with a large number of serious and fatal cases, causing a run on medical resources and leaving normal demand for medical services unaddressed, creating a vicious cycle ... Currently nearly 24 million adults in the U.S. have long-term sequelae of COVID and 81% of whom have difficulty with daily activities.'

Since China was dealing with the Omicron variant in both October and December, at least one of the two arguments above was lying.

If they were lying in October, those lies were one of the reasons why Foxconn workers fled in fear (fearing they would be put in quarantine with those who were infected) and the 'closed-loop mode' that imprisoned hundreds of thousands of people (Foxconn shifted to 'closed-loop mode' in the Zhengzhou factory since October 13) was unnecessary.

If they were lying in December, millions of lives across the country will be the price.

### **Two: Deprivation of Liberty for Profit**

Assuming that Omicron is really as terrible as the CCP previously propagated, Zhengzhou Foxconn should shut down the factory and send its workers home - at least reducing the original worker density.

While cell phones are a necessity of modern life, producing a new type of phone of a particular brand is not a necessity - those who need new cell phones can simply buy stock phones that have already been produced.

Even if the virus itself did not kill workers, Zhengzhou's epidemic prevention policy in October had resulted in inadequate or improperly arranged supplies of food, medicines and other essential services at the Foxconn factory. In this case, the factory should also take the initiative to evacuate workers.

But did Foxconn take the initiative to evacuate workers or reduce production in October? Did Apple take the initiative to declare that it would not hold Foxconn responsible for not fulfilling the order? Obviously not. Because for them, profit is the most important. Foxconn was worried that not

completing Apple's order on time would cause the latter to shift future orders; Apple was worried that missing out on Christmas season sales would result in market share decline, and the Zhengzhou government was worried about falling tax revenue, export volume and employment rate.

Keeping workers from leaving the factory for profit, requiring them to stay in the closed loop between workshops and dormitories, and not even providing enough food -those are conditions of modern slavery. Foxconn and Apple cannot put all the blame for these evil deeds on the CCP, because they had other options.

Clearly, Foxconn was not the only company that implemented 'closed-loop mode', Apple was also not the only brand that gave orders to factories that confined workers. All companies and brands that disregarded the deprivation of workers' freedom for the sake of profits during the epidemic should be condemned, and workers have the right to seek compensation.

### **Three: Creating and Taking Advantage of Hunger**

Large number of Foxconn workers escaped from the factory in 2022 reminded people of the Great Famine of Henan in 1942 - the victims of that time had fled on foot across the same land. There is no reliable evidence to prove any workers starved to death or not, but videos and workers' narratives demonstrate that hunger did occur in Foxconn. And in the same year, even people in Shanghai - China's most economically advanced city - had experienced hunger for months.

The food consumption in a factory with hundreds of thousands of people is huge. Foxconn could blame the local government's lockdown policy for blocking its logistics, but the example of Shanghai not long ago should have predicted the situation in Zhengzhou. The absence of a reliable backup plan or refusing to stop production and evacuate workers when the backup plan had failed, made Foxconn an accomplice in creating hunger.

It is hard to find out how many workers actually fled in Foxconn Incident 1.0, but we know the majority of workforce stayed. In fact, these two options were somehow choices between 'imminent short-term hunger' and 'long-term hunger after unemployment'. The reason why Foxconn was able to recruit a large number of workers to fill the gap shortly after Incident 1.0 was precisely because the CCP's Zero-COVID policy had caused economic winter and massive unemployment. Therefore, the recruitment package promised by Foxconn became very attractive - the company enjoyed the dividend of the reserve labor force accidentally created by the CCP.

### **Four: Violation of Private Property Rights**

Another evil deed that should not be ignored is that the factory threw away, damaged and moved away workers' personal belongings in their dormitories without permission in the name of extermination of virus. This contributed to the outbreak of Incident 2.0. Videos show that people in white protective clothing threw personal belongings directly out of dormitory windows, with the falling objects piling up two stories high on the ground. Some employees even complained that some of the items thrown out included valuable property.

Although it is debatable how long the virus can survive outside the human body, it is certain that the virus will be inactivated after leaving the host for a period of time. Foxconn could have put workers' personal belongings in quarantine bags and marked the room number, letting them to claim later. But the company did not intend to spend manpower, time and storage space to protect its employees' belongings. On the other hand, in order to fulfill Apple' order, Foxconn wanted to empty

dormitories as soon as possible to accommodate newly recruited workers. This was likely the main reason for such disgusting behavior.

There was a case at Foxconn's Shenzhen factory in 2020: an employee committed suicide by jumping off a building because a prototype iPhone he was responsible for keeping was lost and the company's investigation put a lot of pressure on him. How many pieces of workers' belongings were thrown away and destroyed by Foxconn? Why didn't Foxconn and Apple treasure these items like their products?

It turns out that the 'sanctity of private property' proclaimed by capitalists only applies to companies' property, and workers' property can be trampled by them at will! Thus, we can understand why some workers in Foxconn Incident 2.0 vandalized the factory to vent their anger. Moreover, Foxconn workers only destroyed the symbols of oppression, such as PCR testing booths and police cars; they did not smash production lines, which are most valued by the company. This showed that the workers are much more civilized than their boss.

In last three years, countless citizens' belongings had been damaged and obliterated due to the CCP's disinfection measures. Perhaps the latter also worried that the general public would revolt to fight for the universal 'sanctity of private property', just like the workers in Foxconn.

### **Five: Reneging on Promises**

After Incident 1.0, Foxconn's recruiting channels released very attractive conditions: 15,000 yuan of full attendance bonus for November, and other allowances was also increased to four times of the previous ones. However, the newly arrived workers found out that: they could only receive the full attendance bonus for November if they keep working in Foxconn until March 15, 2023; and if they are absent from work for more than seven days, they could not receive the bonus.

This perfidious practice was one of the fuses that ignited Incident 2.0.

Afterwards, Foxconn said that the problem was caused by a computer information input error. This poor excuse showed the company's arrogance. There were only two possibilities: either the number of newly recruited workers was higher than expected, making Foxconn feel that it had a bargaining power; or a shady contract had been prepared from the beginning to cheat the new workers.

But in any case, the workers' anger taught Foxconn a lesson. After an unorganized 'uprising' by a portion of the workforce, the management threw up their hands and surrendered, saying that they would pay according to the original promise.

But such spontaneous 'uprising' is unlikely to occur every time the management cheats, threatens or suppresses; and in much smaller workplaces than Foxconn, even 'uprisings' do not always get attention. Therefore, Chinese workers must fight for the right to organize legally, to build unions that are truly owned by workers, steadfastly speak for workers, and always hold companies to their promises.

### **Six: Violent Repression**

In Incident 2.0, the police repression was horrific. There are videos showing that the workers who fell alone were lynch mobbed. Faced with unreasonable use of violence, some workers began to take up sticks, bricks and even fire extinguishers (specially used to deal with tear gas) to fight back.

We don't know if the violent crackdown on November 22 was ordered by the government or if it was requested by Foxconn. But neither Foxconn nor Apple has publicly apologized to the workers who were harmed. The CCP, which claims to be the 'vanguard of Chinese workers', brought in more armed police forces from other regions overnight.

The violent repression was an example of the collusion between business and government in China. Some workers who were aware of this also chanted slogans against the CCP. Although this awareness was only held by a minority, it pointed to the direction of the struggle: not only fight against individual companies, but also against the entire political and economic dictatorship. In the 'White Paper Movement' that occurred shortly afterwards, there were also angry slogans directed against the CCP.

Although workers do not have the force to resist the state's repressive machines, they have another power that can deter the CCP - to stop working, to stop making profits for capitalists and the state. If the source of money is cut off, then the CCP's thugs will stop following order and even turn their guns around - as the 'White Guards' who carried out Xi's Zero-COVID policy also took to the streets to demand unpaid wages after they were fired when the government gave up the policy afterward.

## **Seven: Silent Accomplices**

In the Foxconn incidents, Foxconn and the CCP have been at the forefront of public criticism. However, few people have asked what responsibility Apple should take. The latter takes away most profits in this industry chain, but never speaks out for justice or uses its power to help workers.

Perhaps Apple fears that any involvement - condemnation, investigation, or compensation - will be met with resentment by the CCP and the subsequent loss of the huge Chinese market.

But on the other hand, Apple's non-committal stance mean that it pressured Foxconn to complete its order on time, indirectly leading to the continuation of 'closed-loop mood' without regard for workers' lives.

Apple is one of the most profitable companies in the world (number one in 2021 and number two in 2022), and it has a lot of cutting-edge technology that is the result of human ingenuity. There is a Western proverb: with great power comes great responsibility. Apple has the ability to find the truths which are not clear in the Foxconn incidents, to bring more attention to the sufferings of hundreds of thousands of workers, to correct the bad behaviors of its suppliers, and even to help workers seek justice. But it chose to remain silent and evade responsibility.

After the Beijing Sitong Bridge protest, Apple also shut down the airdrop function of its products in China at the request of the CCP, because people were using airdrop to spread Peng Zaizhou's protest slogans and it was difficult to trace the senders. This practice showed that Apple not only keeps silent about the injustice, but also covers the mouths of its users.

If more and more people - as consumers, users, employees and community members - stop being silent and come out against injustice and oppression, these big companies will eventually feel the pressure and stop being accomplices.

## **Borderless Movement**

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<https://borderless-hk.com/2023/01/14/why-did-foxconn-workers-protests-in-zhengzhou-happen-the-seven-evil-deeds-of-foxconn-the-ccp-and-apple/>