

China: Strikes and riots

Thursday 20 September 2007, by [CHENG Eva](#) (Date first published: 14 August 2007).

During the last week of August, more than 3000 workers at the state-controlled Chengdu Power company went on strike at their diesel engines producing plant in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, and protested at the city government offices. The action was a bid to pressure the factory management to honour the original agreement under which working conditions would be changed while the company is restructured for privatisation.

The strike continued into September and on September 5, workers wrote to the Chengdu City government urging it to stand up for them.

The workers made clear they wouldn't welcome city government interference with their efforts to organise a trade union independent of the All China Federation of Trade Unions. The ACFTU monopolises the legal right to organise workers in China, but is infamous for failing to stand up for workers' rights. The workers emphasised that they need representatives who "really represent" their interests.

Production was so disrupted that Chengdu Power's mother company, Kunming Yunnei Power, which is listed on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, had to suspend trading of its shares on August 29. Kunming Yunnei is one of 520 major enterprises listed by Beijing as the country's top industrial powerhouses that have received privileged state support.

As a state firm, Chengdu Power workers were entitled to, on top of a deflated wage, health care, aged pensions, housing and education. As part of the restructuring, in July workers were offered a one-off lump sum in lieu of future claims to such entitlements. The original offer was 2600 yuan (A\$412) for every year of service, but this was later reduced to 1800 yuan.

64tianwang.com reported on August 31 that according to a workers' representative, workers were particularly angered that while the company's senior management is well taken care of, the workers don't even receive basic protection. The worker added that while the managers have fled, the workers have been rostered on to guard the factory, "to defend state property". Workers have accused the management of siphoning off the enterprise's fund for its private gain.

Meanwhile, in another rare sign of self-organisation that has undoubtedly alarmed Beijing, on September 3 some 2000 former soldiers who had been redeployed to the state rail service launched simultaneous riots over poor conditions in three far-flung provinces — Baotou in Mongolia, Wuhan of Hubei Province and Baoji of Shaanxi Province.

The "demobilised soldiers" undergoing retraining found their dormitory conditions unacceptable. One complaint was that there wasn't even a power connection in the rooms and any access to power had to be paid for at an unreasonable price. The rioters extensively damaged the retraining facilities, including smashing glass doors and overturning at least two vehicles, according to the September 12 edition of Hong Kong-based Ming Pao Daily.

More than 1000 rioters participated in the Baotou riot, confronting hundreds of police. More than 20 people were injured and five arrested.

P.S.

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