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HRW – Human Rights Watch

China: Release Workers, Student Activists

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Over Two Dozen Wrongfully Detained as Crackdown Spreads

(New York) - The Chinese (<https://www.hrw.org/asia/china-and-tibet>) government should immediately release workers and students arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared during a nationwide crackdown since mid-2018, Human Rights Watch said today. Those held include factory workers, labor activists, college students, trade union officials, and a lawyer.

“It’s ironic that a self-proclaimed socialist government is cracking down on young Marxists,” said Yaqiu Wang (<https://www.hrw.org/about/people/yaqiu-wang>), China researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The persecution of student labor activists only exposes the absurdity of the Chinese government’s claim to champion workers’ rights.”

In July, police in Guangdong province detained several workers at Jasic Technology, a welding-equipment manufacturer in the city of Shenzhen, after they attempted to form an autonomous union under the auspices of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the sole legal vehicle for workers’ rights in China. The workers had long complained about low wages, poor working conditions, and management abuses. After learning about the arrests on social media, dozens of concerned college students and recent graduates from across the country went to Shenzhen to protest. Wearing T-shirts with portraits of workers and singing socialist anthems, the students said (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/28/world/asia/china-maoists-xi-protests.html>) that they were “Marxist” and they “stood with workers.”

On July 27, the police detained 29 Jasic Technology workers and student activists, accusing them of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Fifteen of them were later released. The released detainees told reporters that police threatened (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-labour-protests-insight/chinas-student-activists-cast-rare-light-on-brewing-labor-unrest-idUSKBN1L0060>) them with death and that they would only be released if they confessed. On August 11, three unidentified individuals seized one of the leading activists, Shen Mengyu, as she was having dinner with her father and bundled her (<https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2018/08/student-activists-and-chinas-evolving-labor-movement/>) into an unmarked vehicle.

On August 24, police officers wearing riot gear raided the apartment in which the activists were staying and detained about 50 people, including Yue Xin, a graduate of Peking University who had been known for her activism in China's #MeToo movement. Yue had earlier published an open letter (<https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2018/08/no-one-can-resist-the-tides-of-history-detained-activist-yue-xin-on-the-jasic-workers/>) to President Xi Jinping, calling for the release of the detained workers and activists and for the central government to investigate the case.

On November 9 and 11, authorities initiated another round of mass arrests as unidentified men in at least five cities rounded up over a dozen activists, beating some of them and taking them away in cars. In Beijing, they abducted Zhang Shengye on the campus of Peking University, from which he recently graduated. Passers-by who witnessed the scene were also beaten. A witness alleged that university security did not intervene to stop the abuse (<https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2018/11/%E4%BA%8E%E5%A4%A9%E5%A4%AB%E5%BC%9A%E6%88%91%E5%9C%A8%E5%8C%97%E5%A4%A7%E7%99%BE%E8%AE%B2%E8%A2%AB%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%8E%E8%BA%AB%E4%BB%BD%E7%9A%84%E9%BB%91%E8%A1%A3%E4%BA%BA%E6%AE%B4%E6%89%93/>). In Shenzhen, police detained two officials (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-labour/two-chinese-trade-union-officials-arrested-after-helping-workers-source-idUSKCN1NZ0SP>) from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, who had helped workers to apply to set up a union and advised them about the law. On November 30, unidentified men took away Huang Sha (<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/linked-11302018115409.html>), a lawyer who had been representing former Jasic workers and student activists, from his Shenzhen home.

By the end of November, 32 workers and activists (<https://jiashigrsyt.github.io/zxbbslmd/>) remained in police custody or were missing, the Jasic Workers Support Group told Human Rights Watch. Four workers have been formally arrested on the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Some families of the student activists received police notices informing them that the activists had been put under “residential surveillance at a designated location,” a form of secret incommunicado detention (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/12/china-dont-legalize-incommunicado-detentions>) that enables the police to hold individuals outside of the formal detention system for up to six months without access to legal counsel or family members.

Meanwhile, university officials across China have harassed student Marxists, preventing them from holding meetings or participating in protests. Students have also had difficulties registering (<https://www.ft.com/content/ccab09aa-bdc2-11e8-8274-55b72926558f>) Marxist student groups with university authorities.

In protest of the Chinese government's crackdown on the student activists, Cornell University in New York State, in October, suspended two student exchange programs with Renmin University, calling Renmin's treatment of its student activists “a violation of academic freedom” (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/10/29/cornell-ends-partnership-chinese-university-over-academic-freedom-concerns>)."

Chinese law (http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-08/05/content_20697.htm) prohibits the forming of independent labor unions. All workers seeking to organize must affiliate with the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Human Rights Watch has called upon (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2001/03/16/china-labor-rights-violated-despite-new-treaty>) the Chinese government to ratify the core conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) without delay.

China is a member of the ILO, which has a representative in Beijing. But it has not ratified the Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, or the Convention on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. As a member of the ILO, China is obligated to respect the right of free association, even if it has not ratified the relevant convention.

“The Chinese government views the alliance between students and workers a threat to its rule,” Wang said. “International labor organizations and universities around the world should show solidarity with Chinese workers and students and speak out against China’s suppression of labor activism.”

ecoi.net summary:

Arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances of over 24 students and workers nationwide since mid-2018



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