China: a mounting tide of working class anger

27 June 1998

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Scattered reports out of China indicate growing working class anger at the destruction of millions of jobs in state-owned industries, unpaid wages and the lack of social security provisions.

On June 16 in the city of Wuhan, some 2,000 workers laid off from a construction company protested against the lack of unemployment benefits. Other workers also demonstrated in Wuhan, as well as Xi'an. A month earlier, 50 workers from a cotton mill in the northern Hebei province stormed a government building and occupied the cafeteria to protest against unpaid wages.

The jobs of an estimated 10 million workers in state-owned firms are being eliminated. Some 3.5 million are to go this year alone. The job cuts are not confined to the state sector. Angang Holdings, the largest steel company in China, owned by a Hong Kong consortium, has announced it will cut 5,000 jobs or 10 percent of its work force. Other transnational companies affected by the Asian crisis have closed their China offices.

Government agencies are resorting to desperate measures to head off a social explosion. In Beijing, the Municipal Peoples Congress has banned all nonresidents from holding employment in the city. It is attempting to push unemployed workers to return to a peasant farming existence.

Similar measures in the northeast province of Heilongjiang are said to have led to more than 200,000 former factory workers returning to the countryside.

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