

Bomb blasts in Fuzhou, China

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A cloud of dust and debris over the Chinese city of Fuzhou in the mid-eastern Jiangxi province last Thursday morning was a further indicator that the country is mired in deepening and intractable social and economic contradictions.

Three bombs exploded near government buildings, killing two men instantly, including the bomber. Six people were injured, and two of them died in hospital. According to the official account given by the state-run Xinhua news agency, Qian Mingqi, unemployed and 52-years-old, first blew up a car outside the prosecutorial office just after 9 am. Another explosion followed near the headquarters of the Linchuan district government. Half an hour later, there was another blast outside the offices of a drug regulatory bureau.

However, unnamed local officials explained to the Hong Kong-based *Ming Pao Daily* that Qian's real target was not the drug bureau, but the Linchuan district government. The first car loaded with explosives had entered its building's car park at around 8 am. Qian then attempted to drive another car into the car park from the east entrance, but was stopped by security. Minutes later, the first car exploded, followed by the car Qian was driving. The shock waves hit the drug regulatory bureau nearby and Qian's body was thrown 40 metres. An official told the *Ming Pao Daily*: "If both the explosions occurred at both the east and the west end of the car park, the entire building could have collapsed, which would have been Fuzhou's 9/11."

The authorities are seeking to conceal details of the event. Beijing's central propaganda department issued a decree that all media outlets must use the Xinhua news agency account. No photos, video or features were permitted to be published. The Fuzhou government initially planned a media conference that afternoon but it was cancelled. Reporters who rushed to the city were asked to stay in a single hotel, in order to prevent them from interviewing witnesses.

The *Los Angeles Times* noted that "angry reporters in Fuzhou complained that police confiscated their notebooks and cell phones and deleted photographs from cameras. An

early report posted on the official New China News Agency [Xinhua] site that described the attacks as retaliation against local government was later removed."

Reports and photographs of the bombings nevertheless quickly made their way onto the Internet thanks to the widespread use of mobile phones, and social networking and blogging sites.

Xinhua published some details about the alleged bomber's Internet blogging page. It indicated that he was angry over a property seized by the authorities, for which he complained he was inadequately compensated. Qian wrote that he had decided to take action that "I don't want to take" after years of fruitless attempts to obtain redress for the "illegal removal" of his building in 2002.

Qian posted photos of a white six-floor residential building that was knocked down, along with others, by the city government to make way for an expressway. Qian insisted that the compensation of 252,000 yuan (US\$38,770) was only half the standard price. "Seven of my neighbours also suffered economic losses ranging from one to two million yuan... but some 10 million compensation was embezzled by the Linchuan district cadres," he wrote.

On his microblog, which attracted 13,000 fans, Qian expressed despair that violence was his only option. "I want to learn from Dong Cunrui and hope I can receive the public's support and attention," he wrote. Dong was a peasant army soldier, a heroic figure who carried an explosive package into a bunker in 1948 during the civil war that toppled the former Kuomintang dictatorship.

Qian has reportedly been hailed by many Internet users as a grass-root hero for opposing the regime and its unjust social order. One anonymous supporter wrote: "Well done my brothers!" Another said: "Like the waves of the Yangtze River, one follows another."

These responses are reminiscent of the confused

enthusiasm expressed for another individual act of violence, when a 28-year-old unemployed man, Yang Jia, killed six police officers in Shanghai in 2008 in retaliation for a beating he had received for riding an unlicensed bicycle. Yang was executed.

Earlier this month, a gasoline bomb injured 49 people in a rural bank in Gansu province, reportedly an attack by a former employee who had been dismissed for alleged embezzlement.

The Chinese regime is acutely aware that these are not simply acts of desperate individuals, but symptoms of deepening class tensions. Liu Shanying of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated last Thursday: “Our society is going through a period of great change, so it is not unexpected that there is a rise in individuals who take these kinds of extreme measures.”

While the international media often present the mega cities like Shanghai or Beijing as icons of China’s rising economic power, 200 smaller cities with populations exceeding one million, like Fuzhou, are more characteristic of China’s social conditions—widespread poverty, profiteering by rich officials and official contempt for the most elementary democratic rights of the “small people.”

Forced evictions of residents, especially rural farmers, for developmental projects, are driven first of all by the need to modernise infrastructure—in order to meet the demand of global investors for low cost export bases in China. Mass demolitions are also driven by a wave of rampant speculative investment in property markets, fuelled by a flood of state bank credit to prop up the economy after the 2008 outbreak of the global financial crisis.

The Asian Development Bank is financing 44 percent of a \$226 million infrastructure plan for Fuzhou, designed to transform the city into a rail-highway hub for the booming cities in eastern China. The ADB stated: “The economy of Jiangxi Fuzhou lags behind nearby provinces and remains relatively poor. In 2007, per capita disposable income in the urban area was 11,101 yuan (\$1,632.5) compared to per capita rural income of 4,096 (\$602.35). Incomes have been rising rapidly in recent years but remain less than 60 percent of the national average.”

Thugs hired by developers, as well as police, are often deployed to ensure that residents are removed for development projects. Anger over profiteering and official corruption in property speculation often leads to riots and

protests. In March, for instance, hundreds of para-military police and troops were sent to break up a five-day protest of 2,000 villagers in Suijiang County, between Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. They were protesting against inadequate compensation for the forced removal of 60,000 people to make way for one of the country’s largest hydroelectric projects.

A study by Tsinghua University sociologist Sun Liping, published in February, pointed out that there were 180,000 such “mass incidents” across China during 2010, double the level in 2006. Many of these protests were triggered by forced evictions, which are driven by growing demands for land that are generated by a frenzied investment bubble.

According to the National Statistics Bureau, capital investment accounted for 46.2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) last year, up from 45.2 percent in 2009, while household consumption fell to 33.8 percent, down from 35 percent during the same period. Economists have warned that such levels of spending on infrastructure, factories and property, while temporarily salvaging China from the global crash, must inevitably lead to massive overcapacity and bad debts for banks.

At the same time, the declining proportion of household consumption in the GDP is an indication of the continuing erosion of living standards of the working people.

The resulting extreme social inequality has been highlighted by the latest *Forbes* list of 213 Chinese-origin billionaires. They now control 12 percent of the world’s total wealth, largely because of China’s soaring real estate prices. Zhou Jiangong, chief editor of *Forbes China*, explained: “The development of residential projects, hotels, commercial properties and the quick urbanisation on China’s mainland has provided an unprecedented feast of fortune.”

The bomb blasts in Fuzhou are another sign of the social tensions building up in China that, sooner or later, must find expression in an explosion of the class struggle.



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