

Strikes escalate in China

John Chan**30 December 2011**

A protracted struggle since December 4 by thousands of workers at Shenzhen Hailiang Storage Products, owned by Japan's Hitachi corporation, is a sign that the strikes that have broken out in China in recent weeks are taking an increasingly militant form.

Hailiang's 4,500 workers, who are mainly female, produce hard drives at the plant. They have demonstrated considerable courage in their confrontations with riot and special police, and in resisting intimidation by the government and state-run trade unions. They have been protesting against a planned merger with American-owned Western Digital, after a Japanese manager told them that their years of service would be reduced to zero, eliminating severance pay and other entitlements.

More than 2,000 workers immediately staged a sit-in, but the management, with the backing of the Shenzhen municipal government, continued to ignore workers' demands for negotiating compensations. Video footage of the December 5 sit-in and a subsequent confrontation with riot police can be seen [here](#).

Police cordoned off the plant and on December 10, with the approval of management, 100 riot police attempted to storm the warehouse and arrest the occupying workers. A thousand workers resisted by encircling the police. A video of workers being arrested can be seen [here](#).

A worker posted a blog on a local forum site explaining that the police stormed the industrial park without any arrest warrants. When workers questioned the legality of the police actions, the "answer is the batons wielded by riot police!" The brutality was witnessed by workers from nearby factories who were starting their shifts. Many of these workers intervened

and also clashed with the police, throwing food and bottled water at the riot officers. Workers shouted slogans accusing the government of being a "collaborator" and "running dog" of the foreign investors.

After the police intervention failed to crush the Hailiang protest, management sought to end the strike by buying off a section of the workforce. On December 19, the company promised to provide extra housing and car subsidies to senior white collar workers and team leaders, if they could collect signatures from workers supposedly demanding a return to work. About 400 office workers and team leaders have formed a rival camp opposing the strike, against the production line workers. Management also sought to buy off the elected representatives of the strikers, by offering a few hundred yuan for each striker who signed a return-to-work agreement.

Wang Tongxing, deputy chairman of Shenzhen branch of the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), delivered a threatening speech on December 24 at a Hailiang workers' assembly. The bureaucrat urged an immediate end to the strike, stating "the ACFTU disagreed with such methods". Wang warned: "Occupying warehouse and production facilities is illegal. Obstructing the right to labour by workers is illegal, handing out leaflets and inciting workers to strike is illegal." Anyone who was guilty of these crimes, he added, "cannot escape".

The police-state response to the Hailiang strike is rooted in the CCP regime's fear that any protracted struggle by workers would rapidly provide a focus point for a broader movement of the working class.

The Hailiang strike coincided with other struggles in the past fortnight. A 24-hour sit-in was staged on

December 17 by 300 workers at Dongguan Essential Paper Products Company, which supplies domestic and international paper packaging firms, such as US-based MeadWestvaco. The workers protested after the plant was abruptly shut down without notice. Management simply disappeared without a trace. The government has refused to sell the factory's machinery and goods to fund workers' unpaid wages, insisting that debtors must be paid first.

On December 26, 8,000 workers at the South Korean-owned LG Display plant in Nanjing went on strike over the company's decision to give an end-of-year bonus that was only one-sixth of what Korean employees received. The complex's 80 assembly lines, making LCD and LED televisions, came to a halt. According to US-based *China Labour Watch*, a number of strikes have taken place at the factory over the poor treatment of employees, who work up to 290 hours a month for no more than \$430. The article noted that workers at LG factories in Guangdong province have paid close attention to the strikes in Nanjing, as they face similar conditions.

On December 28, 1,500 workers at the Japanese-owned Aries Auto Part Corporation in Guangzhou, stopped production in protest against cuts to end-of-year bonuses. The company supplies parts for Japanese auto companies such as Honda, Toyota and Nissan. This is the second strike, following one last April over low wages.

The low wages and poor conditions of Chinese workers have been further undermined as a result of falling export orders from major Western markets, especially in crisis-stricken Europe. Guangdong authorities have suspended a planned 20 percent increase in the minimum wage that was due to be introduced next year. The decision is intended to boost manufacturing profits, but will only intensify the conflict with the working class. As the global economic crisis worsens after the 2008 financial crash, when more than 20 million Chinese workers lost their jobs, the latest strikes are only a foretaste of what is to come.

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