

Explosion wreaks destruction in Chinese city of Tianjin

James Cogan
13 August 2015

Two major explosions just after 11.30 p.m. yesterday have devastated large parts of the port of Tianjin, a major Chinese industrial city with a population of 15 million, located 70 kilometres southeast of Beijing. The second blast sent a massive 100-metre fireball into the sky. Windows were shattered in buildings more than three kilometres from the epicentre of the disaster, while the explosions were heard as far as 50 kilometres away.

So far, reports indicate that at least 17 people had been killed, with hundreds more injured. One hospital had taken in between 300 and 400 victims, according to *Beijing News*. Another hospital told one television station that the casualties were “too many to count.” Most of the injuries were caused by shattered glass and debris.

Huang Shiting, a 27-year-old worker who lives near the docks, told CCTV: “I heard the first explosion and everyone went outside. Then there was a series of more explosions, windows shattered and a lot of people who were inside were hurt and came running out, bleeding.”

The death toll is expected to increase exponentially as poorly constructed dormitories close to the port, that accommodate dock workers, are searched in the morning. One building housing 2,000 migrant workers reportedly collapsed.

Photos of the scene published with daylight reveal utter destruction. Most of the labourers are so-called “migrant workers” from outside the city who are denied the rights of residential status, such as housing subsidies, education and health care.

Available information indicates that the blasts took place in the warehouse of Rui Hai International Logistics, a company licensed to ship “hazardous” material through Tianjin’s sprawling port. What material detonated has not been confirmed by Chinese

authorities, though witnesses reported that there were not chemical fumes in the air, suggesting it may have been stores of explosives.

The China Earthquake Networks Centre, whose equipment recorded the explosions, has estimated that the first blast was the equivalent of three tons of TNT, while the second was the strength of 21 tons of TNT. As many as 100 fire trucks and crews were still combatting the raging blaze in the area surrounding where the Ruihui Logistics warehouse once stood.

The Chinese Public Security Ministry has stated that a fire truck had been dispatched to the warehouse shortly before the explosions, responding to fire alarms. At least three of the dead were firefighters.

The Tianjin explosion, taking place in the heart of a major city close to China’s capital, is the latest in the continuous stream of industrial disasters that kill and maim thousands of Chinese workers and residents each year.

Recent well-documented industrial accidents include:

- * In July, an explosion at an illegal fireworks factory in Heibei province killed 15 and injured 25. The same month, 12 workers were killed and 33 injured when a shoe factory collapsed in Wenling, Zhejiang province, due to substandard construction.

- * In April, some 30,000 people had to be evacuated when an oil leak sparked a catastrophic fire in a chemical plant in Zhangzhou, Fujian province. Six workers were reported injured at the time. The disaster was the second fire at the plant in two years.

- * On December 31, 2014, an explosion in a machinery factory in Foshan, Guangzhong province, killed 17 and injured 20.

- * In August 2014, an explosion at the Kunshun Zhongrong Metal Products factory in Jiangsu Province, which was manufacturing parts for US auto giant

General Motors, killed at least 146 workers. The blast was caused by combustible dust that the management had made no attempt to remove from the facility.

Even comments posted to an article on the Tianjin explosion on the website of the Chinese regime's mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, give a taste of the outrage that exists within the Chinese population to the government and corporate indifference to safety that is the major factor behind the carnage.

One reader wrote: "It's disheartening to see successive reckless disasters in China which were avoidable if they had the heart to learn and rectify their past mistakes."

Another declared: "Hazardous materials should not be placed so close to residential areas. This incident again shows the lack of proper development planning and management. Under the cloud of rapid development, mistakes made earlier should be corrected and should not be left ignored."

The top figure in the Chinese regime, President Xi Jinping, has issued a cynical statement demanding that emergency workers make a "full effort to rescue and treat the injured and ensure the safety of people and their property." Even official Chinese government statistics, however, registered 68,061 deaths due to "work accidents" in 2014.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact