

# Beijing university threatens Marxist student society

Peter Symonds  
1 October 2018

The prestigious Peking University effectively banned the students' Marxist Society after its members came to the support of protesting workers. This response points to fears that political radicalisation and unrest, not only among university students, but among China's exploited working class, could threaten the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) police-state regime.

The reaction of university authorities also underscores the fact that the CCP has long abandoned the principles of Marxism and today serves the interests of a tiny layer of ultra-rich oligarchs. These multi-billionaires have amassed their vast wealth at the expense of the working class over the past three decades of capitalist restoration.

The move against the Marxist Society is all the more remarkable as Peking University was at the centre of the May 4 movement in 1919 that opposed imperialism and China's stifling cultural and literary traditions. Its chief leader Chen Duxiu, a lecturer at Beijing University, turned to Marxism and was a founding member of the CCP and its founding chairman. He opposed Stalin's betrayal of China's 1925–27 revolution and helped forged the Trotskyist movement in China that opposed the Stalinist CCP.

The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on September 24 that the Beijing University's Marxist Society has not been able to re-register for the new academic year because it did not have the required backing from teachers. The society's statement on September 21 explained: "Everyone can see what the Peking University Marxist Society has done over the past few years to speak out for marginalized groups on campus."

According to the FT article, the deregistration of the Marxist Society followed "a summer of student and worker unrest in the Chinese manufacturing hub of Shenzhen. Students from Peking and other elite

Chinese universities were detained for supporting workers trying to organise a trade union at a Jasic Technology factory."

An article in the *Economist* on September 27 entitled "A spectre is haunting China: Officials in Beijing worry about Marx-loving students" noted that other students faced similar difficulties. "[Y]oung Marxists at a university in Nanjing, an eastern city, said they had also been facing hassles. A Marxist society at another university in Beijing said it was struggling, too."

The *Economist* also reported Zhang Yunfun, a young former member of Peking University's Marxist Society, was arrested during a Marxist study session he organised at a university in the southern city of Guangzhou. He was handed a six-month jail sentence for disturbing public order.

Another Marxist Society member, Zhan Zhenzhen, was arrested in August as students came to the support of protesting workers at the Jasic Technology factory who were trying to organize a trade union independent of the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions that functions as an industrial policeman.

Most strikes and protests by Chinese workers are not reported in the country's heavily censored media, but the Jasic Technology dispute has attracted attention. The company makes hi-tech welding equipment for export, including to the United States.

A report posted on the Hong Kong-based *China Labor Watch* website on July 30 explained that many Jasic Technology workers had been beaten up by company security guards for their participation in establishing a union. "On July 27, a total of 30 workers and supporters were detained. Afterwards, the 15 supporters, who visited the police station multiple times to understand what was happening and to request the release of those detained, were also taken away by

police on July 30.”

The FT reported on August 2 that in response: “Student groups across China are now publishing online petitions in support of the workers, with 11 universities circulating petitions by Thursday morning, and more than 1,600 signatories. ‘Our ancestors’ baton is firmly in our hands,’ reads one petition by students from Peking University.”

The *Hong Kong Free Press* reported on September 1: “Last month students and recent graduates from more than a dozen mainland Chinese universities turned out to provide solidarity support for workers of Jasic Technology. The activists included students from Peking University, Tsinghua University, Nanjing University, and Sun Yat-sen University. They wore T-shirts with the slogan ‘unity is power’ printed in bold red.”

The article noted that the students and former students were from a generation born in the 1990s and early 2000s when the CCP regime’s pro-market agenda was accelerating. “In and through self-organized study groups, internships, and waged work, the student activists understand the need for more progressive legal reforms and a fairer share of economic gains for those who produce them,” it stated.

A significant statement by one of the arrested Jasic Technology workers entitled “We must emancipate the lower class and fight on behalf of workers” was posted on *China Labor Watch* on August 21. The lengthy article not only details the abuse suffered by the workforce at the hands of the company and police, but also outlines his own experiences. He details the oppressive conditions he faced in one factory after another after he migrated from a rural area.

Under the influence of various neo-Maoist organisations, however, he has concluded that workers need to return to a study of Mao Zedong’s writings. “Us workers urgently need Maoism to arm us. I urge promoters of Maoism to come into our factories, into the industrial areas, into the midst of workers, and teach us about Mao Zedong and Maoism!” he declared.

In fact, Maoism, a version of the reactionary Stalinist theory of “Socialism in One Country,” laid the basis for the overturn of the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution and the restoration of capitalism beginning in the 1970s. What workers and students urgently need to assimilate are the works of the Trotskyist movement,

the Fourth International and its Chinese members, who waged a courageous political struggle against Stalinism and Maoism. That is the only basis on which a genuinely revolutionary movement uniting workers in China with their class brothers and sisters around the world can take place.

According to the *Economist*, the Marxist Society at Peking University reportedly completed the process of re-registering on September 26, after the head of the university’s Marxism department agreed to act as its sponsor. Even if the Society is finally registered, there is no doubt that university authorities, as well as other elements of the CCP apparatus, will be monitoring the activities of the society and its members very closely.

Nevertheless, it would be significant historically if Peking University, which gave birth to Marxism in the 1920s, should now become one of the centres for the revival of genuine Marxism in China—that is, of Trotskyism.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**