

Chinese regime cracks down on student labour activists

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At least 12 workers and student activists have been detained in police raids in China since last Friday in a desperate attempt to suppress labour militancy. The crackdown is another sign of growing unrest in the Chinese working class and fear in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime that the involvement of students will politicise the strikes and protests.

Initial media coverage on Sunday reported that dark-clothed men had been beating activists and kidnapping them into black cars in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou on Friday. According to friends of the activists, many of them were recent graduates of elite universities prominent in campaigns to defend the rights of workers.

According to the *New York Times*, unidentified men descended on the campus of Peking University in Beijing around 10 p.m. Friday searching for Zhang Shengye, a recent graduate. An eyewitness called Yu Tianfu reported that Zhang was beaten and dragged into a car.

“Who are you? Why are you doing this?” Mr. Yu said he asked the men. “I’ll beat you more if you dare shout again,” one of the men responded, according to Mr. Yu.

Four other students and alumni were arrested, according to Reuters, which also cited a video posted by a university student who said that he and other nearby students were pushed to the ground and prevented from leaving until they deleted evidence of the incident from their phones.

In a social media post on Sunday, Yu said, “What kind of privilege do they have to completely disregard the law and civil rights? How dare they unscrupulously and arrogantly beat up students and kidnap one at Peking University.”

Yu is now missing, according to his fellow

classmates, and his social media account has been deactivated. A collection of posts on the university’s internal messaging board with screenshots of the event has also been taken down.

A spokesman from the university said simply, “Public security organs in accordance with law seized non-campus affiliated persons suspected of committing a crime.”

Zhang’s associates denounced the university as complicit in the seizure, claiming that they “acquiesced to the kidnapping.”

Three more people were violently arrested in the city of Wuhan on Sunday. They were members of the Jasic Workers Support group, which also identified the abductors as police. The group said that one of their members in Wuhan had been pinned to the ground by three officers.

It also reported that two members of their staff were seized in Shenzhen and three in Guangdong Province, along with an unspecified number of other activists. Five of the activists detained in Guangzhou last Friday were released on Tuesday.

The repression by CCP authorities is an attempt to muzzle a long-running dispute that began in July, when factory workers at Jasic Technology in Shenzhen went on strike against gruelling work conditions, underpayments of social insurance and excessive workplace fines.

Workers declared that were being treated “like slaves” and demanded the right to establish a trade union. In the course of the struggle, the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) worked hand-in-glove with management to scuttle the campaign. Thirty workers were beaten and arrested in July. According to the China Labor Bulletin, four of them are still detained, under charges of “gathering a

crowd to disrupt public order.”

In response to the crackdown, dozens of students converged from across the country to support the workers. Before they could organise a demonstration, riot police stormed the apartment block in Huizhou where they were staying, detaining 40 of them.

Eleven are still in police custody or under some form of house arrest, and the whereabouts of some are unknown. Zhang, who was detained last Friday, was leading the search for some of the activists, according to the *Guardian* newspaper.

While the media has identified students as Marxists or Maoists, the movement is politically heterogeneous. In interviews in August, they expressed displeasure with the naked self-interest of many of their peers at China’s elite universities and felt the need to tackle the social crisis facing working people.

Zhang told reporters, “We aren’t solely focused on one particular issue. We’re interested in improving society in all kinds of ways, whether it is improving the lives of factory workers, fighting for gender equality or advocating for environmental sustainability.”

Yue described herself as part of a broad, left-wing organisation, “Student activists have been fighting on a wide range of issues—including against sexual harassment and in support of democracy on campus ... not everyone in this movement would identify as Marxist, Leninist or Maoist but they are certainly all influenced by Marxism.”

Some of the activists emphasised that they were not calling for a revolutionary change to the government and viewed President Xi Jinping favourably.

The CCP, however, is terrified of a movement of the working class. It recalls the social upheaval that was triggered in 1989 when student protests in Tiananmen Square led to strikes and protests by workers voicing their own class interest that threatened the existence of the regime.

The brutal crackdown in 1989 set the stage for an acceleration of the processes of capitalist restoration, which both greatly expanded the size of the working class and enormously widened the social gulf between the super-wealthy oligarchs that the CCP represents and the vast majority of working people.

The CCP is well aware that it is sitting atop a social powder keg. According to the China Labour Bulletin, 1,332 strikes and collective protests by workers took

place in the first nine months of this year, compared to last year’s total of 1,257. These figures, which rely on media reports and contacts in China, greatly underestimate the extent of strikes as many either go unreported or the reports are censored.

The critical issue for students is the political perspective on which to base a political struggle against the CCP apparatus and its police-state methods. No amount of pressure will compel it to grant significant concessions.

Moreover, Maoism, or Stalinism with Chinese characteristics, and its program of national autarchy was what opened the door for capitalist restoration and the gross exploitation of the working class. The Trotskyist movement, based on socialist internationalism, has waged a decades-long struggle against Stalinism and provides the revolutionary alternative needed to politically fight the CCP regime.



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