Chinese authorities extract forced confessions from student activists

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Over the past month, Chinese authorities have intensified their crackdown on student labour activists from elite universities, about 50 of whom have been detained. Many are members of the Jasic Workers Solidarity Group, which last year had supported workers seeking to establish an independent union at the Jasic Technology factory in Shenzhen.

The *Financial Times* reported late last month that students had been shown video clips of detained students, purportedly admitting to attempting to "subvert the state" or maintaining contact with foreign journalists. All of the statements have the character of confessions extracted under psychological duress and possibly physical torture.

The students appearing in the video, who have already been in the custody for half a year, include Yue Xin, Gu Jiayue, Zheng Yongming and Shen Mengyu. All of them have a history of pro-labour activism. Gu and Zheng were arrested November 2017 for holding "Maoist discussion groups."

In the video, Gu declared that she had been victimised by "the radical left-wing theories" due to her "lack of knowledge of Chinese society." She further stated that "under the police education" she had been able to correct her views.

Zheng confessed to creating a web site "to spread and sensationalise some negative and sensitive events in the society, thus to arise intense discontent among the masses of various classes against the society, against the government, in order to promote our radical left-wing ideas and enlarge our mass basis for it."

According to the *Financial Times*, friends of the detainees said the statements appeared to be forced, with one commenting that the students looked so unnatural they thought they had been "drugged." "Their expressions are dull and their faces colourless, and seem partly swollen," said one friend. "It makes you wonder what kind of treatment they were receiving inside [the prison]."

Other students condemned the authorities for producing the video. The *New York Times* reported online posts such as: "Do not use confession videos to cover up your sins; you can't imagine that people will give up the fight because of a video."

In July last year, workers at Jasic Technology, which manufactures welding equipment, took industrial action against poor working conditions and abusive management. They sought to establish a trade union independent of the ACFTU, the state-run union that functions as a police force to suppress any opposition by workers.

This struggle, to which management responded by beating up and sacking militant workers, won support from students. Groups of students travelled to Shenzhen to solidarise themselves with the workers' demonstrations. Some students were intercepted and turned back, while others were detained in police raids on their boarding places.

Families of detained students have been warned by police not to contact foreign media or hire lawyers. One of their friends told Reuters: "There has been no news of these classmates since they went missing in August. Neither families nor lawyers have been allowed to see them. Where they are being held, what they have suffered, we don't have a clue."

The detentions have been ongoing, with some students arrested at home with their families and others on university campuses. It is evident that university authorities have supported the abductions and are seeking to suppress student activism. Last year the student-based Marxist Society at the prestigious Peking University was reorganised under close supervision by

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the state apparatus.

On January 20, another group of labour activists were taken into custody by Shenzhen police, under the charges of “gathering a crowd to disrupt the public order.”

On January 26, the Jasic Workers Solidarity Group tweeted: “Emergency: Seven students from Peking University and Renming University were once again kidnapped by the political police!”

One of those detained, Peking University student Zhang Ziwei, described others being grabbed by unidentified people. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that he had sent a video message to friends in which he said he would hear people going door-to-door. “The proletariat doesn’t fear death, much less repression!” he said in the video.

The police-state crackdown on student activists reflects the fear in the Chinese Communist Party apparatus of a political movement of the working class for basic social and democratic rights that challenges the government itself. The growing radicalisation of students and youth is a product of the deep social gulf that exists between the masses of working people and a regime that defends the interest of the super-rich oligarchs that have benefitted from the processes of capitalist restoration since 1978.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square protests that were brutally suppressed by the CCP regime. While the demonstrations began with students calling for democratic rights, workers in Beijing and in other major cities joined in and issued their own class demands in opposition to the growing inflation and job losses that followed the opening up of China to the capitalist market.

Today, the working class has enormously expanded and poses an even greater threat to the CCP. The number of urban workers in China is estimated to be more than 400 million. The *China Labour Bulletin* last year reported more than 1,000 strikes and protests by workers. The actual figure is undoubtedly far higher.

Students and workers need to take stock of the situation. While activists have demonstrated considerable courage in the face of state repression, some of the students are reportedly seeking to resurrect the bankrupt, nationalist perspective of Maoism, the Chinese variant of Stalinism.

Maoism, however, proved to be a political and economic dead-end that paved the way in the 1970s for capitalist restoration. The only means for winning economic and democratic rights is through a political struggle to unify Chinese workers with their brothers and sisters around the world against capitalism, the global corporations that dominate the world economy and their political defenders. This is the perspective of the international Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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