

China: COVID-19 hospital construction worker's protest blog goes viral before being deleted

A correspondent in China
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When the Chinese media and online sites were almost overwhelmed by officially-promoted praise for the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an internal migrant worker involved in this year's rapid construction of Wuhan's coronavirus hospitals attracted popular attention.

He published a blog on social media that exposed the plight of the construction workers, which underscored the brutal social reality facing the Chinese working class as a whole.

The worker was involved in the construction of Leishenshan Hospital, one of the two temporary hospitals built by thousands of workers in just two weeks during the initial period of the pandemic. Thousands of workers arrived from all over China to work around the clock on the two sites.

The government has used the swift construction of the two hospitals as a propaganda tool to promote nationalism and the regime's totalitarian system, with the official media referring to "Chinese speed" or "the Chinese miracle."

However, behind such "speed" and the supposed "miracle" is the real situation of China's workers. Exploited by employers and labour hire companies, they work an average of 12 hours a day and frequently suffer wage arrears and deductions. Poor sanitary conditions and safety protection facilities have also caused dissatisfaction. But these unsafe conditions have been deliberately downplayed or ignored by the official media.

The worker's blog soon had more than 40,000 reposts and comments, but it was quickly deleted, and related discussions were restricted. The suppressed post stated:

We are workers involved in the construction of Leishenshan Hospital. We participated in the construction of isolation wards; we've seen a lot of patients from the ward and ambulances every day. Now that we have finished our work, the company placed us into a residential prefabricated housing area for migrant workers in order to quarantine us. Four to five people live in a room for quarantine. Is this called quarantine? Is this safe?

Hundreds of people working together would be affected if just one person becomes ill. However, in order to save money, the company did not arrange a hotel for us to isolate, and also arranged dozens of security guards to monitor us.

Later, after the local workers in Wuhan could go home, the company started to arrange single prefabricated rooms for us, tardily. But we cannot go in and out freely; our movement is restricted. Just because we are not local workers, they detained us at this place.

The construction company and the labour dispatching company, they exploited us and deducted our wages. Hundreds of millions of funds were taken away by them. We are now controlled by them. People don't know our situation at all. Please circulate this and expose them.

Local workers in Wuhan can already go home, but we migrant workers have been detained here because other cities also refuse to accept workers who have worked in Leishenshan. But what about our lives? We have parents, wives, children. They need money, they need to live. We can't wait here forever!

We only ask for justice, because at the beginning they promised us 14 days of quarantine and said that then we could leave. If that was postponed for any reason,

they would continue to give us living allowances. But now we have nothing. They treat us as refugees and don't give us money.

Hundreds of workers have protested several times. The day before yesterday, a fight broke out. The police took the workers away and locked them up. There are conflicts every day, and the police often come to suppress us.

The salary paid to us by the hospital is deducted by the company, and there is not much money in our hands. Now that they treat us like this, we are very helpless. Violence and protest have become part of daily life. We are too tired to live. Except for the 14-day quarantine subsidy, the government and the company never gave us even a penny after that. Where are all the donations and appropriations to Wuhan?

Please circulate. We hope that the media and journalists will come here to see the real situation of the workers.

Here are some of the comments on the blog, posted on the internet:

1. My mother is a doctor, and the situation is the same for doctors. Doctors sometimes receive subsidies and sometimes nothing. Food is donated but we have to pay for it.

2. We are all abandoned tools after use.

3. Don't let the voice of praise fill my screen; there is still a lot of injustice and exploitation in the world.

4. It's so shameful! They promised so much when they deceived people into work, and after the work, they threw the workers away as garbage! When the government asked people to support the construction, it did not tell people that such a betrayal would occur.

5. They oppress the people who can't make a sound—sanitation workers, security guards, construction workers—all to be enslaved by the ruling class. The ruling class always speaks of noble dedication, which is just a cover for their exploitation of workers.

What the worker described in his blog is by no means an isolated case. It is a true portrayal of the conditions of millions of working class people who are exploited by capitalism in China.

The worst-affected are the migrant workers and those hired through the labour dispatch system. A large section of Chinese workers are classified as "migrant workers." Many of them are from rural areas and are denied equal treatment under the restrictions of the

residential registration system. They have been under the pressure of economic and social status inequality for a long time.

"Labour dispatch" means that a company contracts part of its business to a third party, usually another company. This third party is responsible for dispatching workers to work for the original company. The third-party company is responsible for all the working conditions and salary distribution for the dispatched workers. Under this system, companies' labour costs have been reduced, and so have the conditions and basic rights of workers. As a result, those workers are at the bottom level of the economy, where they often feel they cannot make a sound.

In addition, workplace conditions are poor. In order to reduce corporate costs as much as possible, the company and the capitalist government not only pay no attention to workplace safety and workers' safety training, they also deduct from wages the cost of necessary labour protection equipment, such as masks, helmets, gloves, etc.

As a result, suicides by disabled workers and protests by sick workers have repeatedly occurred. As the blog reveals, the ruling class will choose profit, without hesitation, over workers' health. According to incomplete statistics, in the past six months, more than 290 safety accidents have occurred in China and there were more than 640 accidents in 2019.

While Beijing's capitalist government praises the "Chinese miracle" in the media as part of the nationalist propaganda of the Stalinist ruling party, the working class is paying the price through their sweat, blood and tears. But this is leading to growing struggles. In the past year, there have been more than 1,300 strikes and protests in China.



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