

Interview with a Foxconn worker from China

Our reporters
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The World Socialist Web Site interviewed a worker from China employed at one of the factories under Foxconn—a major subcontractor for global electronics corporations such as Apple. The worker, who asked to be anonymous, explained his experience in the factory and his thoughts on recent developments in China.

World Socialist Web Site: Could you tell us about how you started at Foxconn and what you worked on there?

Worker: I went through a physical exam and a training program before I started at this job. Most workers are young, but there are some middle-aged ones as well. Most of the workers are men. Many people come and leave every day, so there's real mobility at the factory. I mostly pack Apple products on an assembly line.

I chose to work at Foxconn because compared to other factories, it usually follows the contract more closely and hands out pay more on time. In China, wage arrears are very prevalent. Foxconn is one of the few that pays workers on time.

WSWS: What is your workplace like?

W: The area of entire industrial complex is over one square kilometer. Tens of thousands of people live and work together there. The dormitories inside the complex are very crowded and the living conditions are terrible. There are 30 people on my assembly line, most of them are packaging. Some other lines that do assembling would have twice as many people.

WSWS: Could you tell us some more about the working conditions?

W: Before we enter the shop floor, we need to hand in our phones and any other electronic devices. No photos or recordings are allowed in there. The noise level on our assembly line is alright, but I heard that machines can be very loud in stamping plants and workers there need to wear ear plugs. During the shift, you have to stand the whole time and cannot stop for a break. If you do not work efficiently and slow the line, a foreman overseeing this line will come and urge you to work faster. They are very disrespectful to workers and use very abusive language. If you talk back, you'll be fired at once.

There is a rotation between day shift and night shift every other week. I work at least 12 hours every day, with only 1 hour of lunch break. Every day, all I did was mechanically press and close a packaging box. After repeating this single move for a long time, I was very exhausted. My brain was dulled over time. You do not know what time it is on the shop floor and that made every minute even more unbearable.

WSWS: How was the salary at Foxconn?

W: The salary for the first three months is lower than usual. If you work there longer, you are paid somewhat better. If you count my overtime hours, my hourly wage was 17 RMB (\$US2.4).

Foxconn do not delay payment. Even if you only work there for a day, you get something. Foxconn follows a contract, which is slightly better than many small factories. Of course, what's in the contract is very unfair to workers. All clauses basically favor Foxconn. Workers have no right to say no or question anything. All the contract does is make sure workers get paid.

Generally, Foxconn is never short of workers, so the company does not care if you resign or not. An hour after your resignation, the company can replace you with a new worker.

Foxconn will pay for overtime according to their contract. If you have perfect attendance for a whole month, you'll get an extra bonus of 500 RMB. However, the base salary at Foxconn is unbearably low. If you do not work overtime, your hourly wage would be in the single digit. After a month, your wage would be less than half that of workers willing to do extra hours. So everyone works many extra hours. Therefore, the so-called overtime pay is just a scam, tricking people into working longer hours.

WSWS: Does Foxconn pay any social security or insurances?

W: For a fulltime worker, Foxconn starts paying minimum social insurance after the second month on the job. They do not pay for anything for temporary workers or sub-contractors. I'm not sure exactly what percentage

of the workforce is temporary, but full-time workers make up less than half.

WSWS: What are the factory dorms like?

W: They are very shabby. All appliances are very old. The factory basically only makes sure workers are not surrounded by garbage. Every dorm has eight workers. Everyone has a different work schedule, so it is very difficult to have a good rest in the dorm. Also, every worker needs to be cautious about theft. Police will not help find stolen belongings.

WSWS: What are your co-workers like?

W: I cannot interact too much with my co-workers. We were about one meter apart on the assembly line. Most of my co-workers came from the countryside or small towns. Workers' level of education were not very good, mostly elementary school or middle school graduates. Foxconn only requires workers to be literate and can recognize English alphabet.

Workers only have a one-hour lunch break. Everyone seems very exhausted and usually no one starts a conversation. We mostly just talk about lunch. Sometimes other workers talk about the games they were playing, but conversations are never about anything in the news. Everyone is just trying to get through the long day.

WSWS: How about the management at Foxconn?

W: Management is very strict. Every line is supervised by a foreman. First they impatiently urge workers to work faster, then quickly get abusive. Workers' dignity is considered nothing. If the quota is not met at the end of the day, they will keep everyone on the job until all assigned work is finished for this line. Extra work like this is not paid.

WSWS: What were the COVID restrictions like when you were there?

W: When Zero-COVID was in place, workers did not need to get tested very often. If there ever was a need, workers were cooperative. Everyone understands the importance of these measures that prevented the spread of COVID. No one wants to work alongside someone who has tested positive.

WSWS: What do you think of the recent shift to remove most of the public health measures against COVID?

W: I think the Chinese government cares about the economy. For them, facing an economic decline and opposition from the middle class, sacrificing the lives of millions of the poor is not an unbearable price. The Chinese government is confident that they can just give up their responsibility in fighting the pandemic and crack down on any opposition from below.

Ever since the lifting of the Zero-COVID policy, mainstream media across the country made an 180-degree turn in their attitude. They used to claim that China would implement measures to stop COVID at any cost and that all those demanding a removal of these measures were spies from the US. Now, they claim that lifting COVID restrictions has been the wisest decision made by the Chinese government and the virus has become almost harmless.

Almost everyone still wants these public health measures. But they are disoriented and panicked. A lot of people are trying to stock up on masks. There are no voices against lifting these measures. Some people bought the excuses of the Chinese government and changed their attitudes. Some people just remained silent.

WSWS: What do you think of the protest that erupted at Foxconn in late November?

W: Almost all Chinese workers are happy about the struggle that took place at Foxconn, and so am I. On Chinese social media, no one questions what these Foxconn workers did and just sympathize with them. The trigger was that Foxconn changed their contract, essentially an expression of their longstanding contempt for workers' rights in China. And who gave them the power to exploit workers in the first place? It was the Chinese government. In fact, the government of Zhengzhou very quickly joined the crackdown against workers.

I'm not surprised about the outbreak of struggles at Foxconn, but I did not foresee a confrontation on this scale. Foxconn definitely exploits workers by modifying contracts. Foxconn has done similar things many times. Under economic pressures created by the pandemic, Foxconn's modification of contracts became a trigger. It ignited workers longstanding discontent towards these sort of exploitative maneuvers.



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