

Worker in China in violent clash over unpaid wages

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On February 13, a worker Yin, whose wages had been withheld, killed three people in a clash in front of the Dongguan Best Travel Electronics factory in Dongguan, Guangdong Province, China.

Details of what took place are sketchy and the accounts somewhat contradictory.

According to Dongguan City Police, after a long period of unsuccessful wage claims, he clashed with labor agent Zeng and factory staff Zhang and Wei, killing them with a knife. Yin had worked at the factory between March and June last year and left in June.

The worker had gone to the plant several times hoping get the wages he was owed after repeatedly complaining to the relevant authorities but to no avail. He had also begged the agent several times not to withhold wages but was ignored.

When Yin went to the factory again on February 13 to ask for his wages, he was verbally abused and intimidated by the factory's managers. He lost control and eventually lashed out with a knife.

Yin was supposed to be paid 4,000 RMB but this was cut to just 400 RMB. His hourly rate was reduced from 19 RMB to 9 RMB. According to one report, on February 8, Yin had gone to the factory's office to ask for a settlement, but was physically beaten by the agent, Zeng.

Details revealed by NetEase News differ from the police briefing. According to NetEase News, on February 13, Yin again went to the factory to ask for an explanation but was verbally abused by Zeng and threatened with a knife.

While the circumstances are not clear, the knife used in the killings was not brought by Yin, as the police reported, and there may well have been a matter of self-defence.

Yin was arrested and will be prosecuted for murder. Far from taking action against the factory management over its exploitation of workers, the Dongguan police went to the plant to intimidate workers.

Police demanded that workers obey factory rules and seek government help instead of resorting to violence. In reality, government institutions invariably side with employers against workers.

While acts of violence by individual workers are no solution for the working class, the intense frustrations are understandable and the incident points to the extreme social tensions that have built up in China.

Dongguan is a major destination for millions of migrant workers from rural areas who are often grossly exploited by employers.

Yin's case is far from isolated in China, as there have been many cases of workers being left desperate and have killed labor agents who withheld their wages. Well-known cases have taken place in Shanghai, Xi'an, and Shenzhen.

In an interview with a worker who worked in factories for many years detailed his own experience when wages were deducted by agents.

"I often encounter it," he said. "For example, an agent promised a wage of 24 RMB per hour, but after starting to work, the wage became 16 yuan per hour or lower. In addition, agents sometimes find reasons to deduct wages. The wages we receive are rarely the same as what were agreed at the beginning.

"Even if I call the police, the police will not care about such things. When I go to the Labor Bureau, they just tell me to wait. Even if the Labor Bureau did help me get my salary, the factory and the agency did not lose anything."

Asked why he applied for a job through an agency, he explained: "Factories are reluctant to recruit their own employees, because they need to pay workers' insurance and are responsible for their safety. If a worker is recruited by an agency, the factory is not responsible for anything that happened to the worker. Even if the worker is disabled or dies while working, it is difficult to get reasonable compensation.

“The personnel departments of many factories also take bribes from the agents. For workers introduced through the agents, the personnel departments can get a certain amount of money from the agents, ranging from a few hundred or a thousand RMB each.

“If I need to find a job quickly to fill my stomach, then I have to go through an agency to work in the factory.”

Asked his opinion of agents, the worker declared: “They are like bandits robbing money. The police never care about them and the factory is in cahoots with them. They are really hateful.”

He explained that agencies have become a tool for factories to reduce labor costs. Employers rely on agents to brutally squeeze workers, and the Chinese government does not care about this long-standing situation.

In China, there are countless workers like Yin who have had their wages withheld. A large number of workers have had their wages taken away from them, causing enormous financial distress.

Since the so-called reform and opening up, that is capitalist restoration, the Chinese government has touted its economic successes, but these have been built on the brutal oppression of workers.

A number of local governments in China, such as Leiyang, Hengyang, Jiaxing and Weifang, among others, have publicly declared that they have always stood with the capitalist class: “The business of the entrepreneurs is the business of the government, and whoever is against the entrepreneurs is against us.”

This exposes the utter hypocrisy of the Chinese Communist Party’s claim to be socialist. We must reject the lie that a stronger national bourgeoisie means a better future for the working class. Only the unity of workers throughout China and the world at large, united with the rest of the oppressed, on the basis of a genuine socialist perspective, can solve this problem.



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