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China

Solidarity with Chinese workers

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DEFEND THE DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR RIGHTS OF CHINESE WORKERS!

After more than a year in provisional detention, Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang, Chinese labour activists and leaders of Liaoyang demonstrations for workers' rights in March 2002, have been sentenced to seven and four years of prison on charges of 'subversion'.

The decision of the Court was read the 9th of May without the presence of their attorneys because of restrictions imposed to curb the SARS epidemic. Twenty-four hours before, the government of the Peoples Republic of China announced new economic measures against the SARS epidemic and banned state owned companies from "firing employees at will in order to stabilize the employment situation".

Liaoyang is the capital of the Northeast province of Liaoning, once the proud industrial heart of the Chinese working class and now a rust belt of obsolete state owned factories, bankrupted by the pro-capitalist economic policies of the Beijing government. More than 60% of the city's workers are unemployed and in poverty due to the lack of any kind of social protection. Since 1998, more than 25 million state sector workers have been laid off through the country in a restructuring process linked to Chinas WTO membership.

The workers' protests in Liaoning started March 1, 2002 in Daqing oilfields, once the model of Maoist industrialization in the 60s. Tens of thousands demonstrated for their salaries, pensions and labour rights and elected their own independent trade union delegates. Their example was soon followed by the laid-off workers of the Liaoyang Ferro-Alloy Factory, where Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang have been employed. On March 11, 2002 more than 5,000 workers came in front of the City Hall to demand the immediate payment of more than two years of unemployment benefits owed to them, and denounced the corruption and the embezzlement of the money by the factory management and the local authorities under the banner "To steal the money of the pensioners is a crime".

Delegates were elected and the movement spread to the whole city. On March 18, 2002, 30,000 workers from 20 factories demonstrated again to demand the release of Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang, detained by secret police the evening before. The protests continued nearly everyday until March 28, when the local authorities rejected any dialogue with the workers, ordered the evacuation of occupied buildings, arrested three other delegates, and deployed thousands of armed police and soldiers in the city. Even in this situation, 600 workers went back to City Hall on March 28 to demand the liberation of their delegates.

Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang have been under detention since then. Their trial took place in January and they were accused of sedition. Pending the sentence, they remained in custody at the Liaoyang Municipal Detention Center where their health situation has been a matter of great concern to their families and friends. Due to the illness caused by the poor conditions and the brutal treatment, Xiao Yunliang started spitting blood. On March 20, 2003, his wife Su Anhua and 20 worker delegates tried to have a meeting with the local authorities to protest about their health and legal situation. They could not cross the door of Liaoyang's City Hall. The official answer came in the form of the May 9 sentences.

This is how the pro-capitalist Chinese government treats labour activists in the so-called 'People's Republic'! The facts speak for themselves.

We demand immediate freedom for Yao Fuxin and Xiao Yunliang! We hold the Chinese authorities responsible for

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their well-being!

We call on the movement for global justice and the international trade union movement to express their solidarity with these Chinese labour activists and the democratic and labour rights of the Chinese working class.

By the Bureau of the Fourth International