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China

# Exacerbation of Corruption and Social Contradictions

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**In 1989, Chinese students and workers fought against the authoritative bureaucracy and corruption, for democracy and human rights. The struggle had been brutally suppressed, but over the past 21 years, the reality has shown us that it is essential to continue the struggle. It has also adversely proven that the repression has exacerbated the many abuses in the aftermath of the repression.**

Zhang Kai

### **Anti-corruption as the Primary Public Concern**

It is evident that, although the Chinese government has claimed that it is necessary to combat corruption, the situation is gradually deteriorating and now it has become the most serious social problem.

According to a survey, 60% of interviewees consider that official corruption is the problem causing the most damages to the national reputation in 2009. It ranked first on the list in the past consecutive three years. The number of interviewees is the largest one recently, which shows that common people are discontented about the issue (1).

Similarly, as the surveys conducted by the official media like People's Daily and People's Net state, anti-corruption ranks top on the list of public concerns, and the gap between the rich and the poor, and the control of the price of property estates rank the second and the third, replacing food security and medical reform in 2009 (2).

According to the statistics, in 2009, more than 19 provincial officials stepped down due to corruption, which is the largest number in recent years. Among those, we find some well-known names such as Huang Songyou, the Deputy Head of the Supreme People's Court, Zheng Shaodong, assistant to the Head of the Ministry of Public Security, Wang Huayuan, the General Secretary of Chinese Communist Party in Zhejiang Province, and the chairmen of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Guangdong Province, Shandong Province and Guizhou Province.

The statistics are incomplete as they only refer to some of the corrupt and stepped-down officials. There are still numerous corrupt officials remaining in power.

In March 2010, Cao Jianming, the Head of Supreme People's Procuratorate, reported to the National Congress that in 2009, the number of cases of commercial bribes and crimes committed mainly by officials was 10,218, with 18,191 cases of corruption, and 2,670 division heads were involved. Both the number of cases and the people involved have increased over the previous year.

In early 2010, Li Changchun, the head of Supreme People's Procuratorate of Zhoukou Municipal of Henan Province, was suspected of taking advantage of billions of money of the Committee on Basic Infrastructure, and then was under detention and interrogation. It is another case of corrupt officials in the juridical system.

The government announced that it has fought corruption, but in reality, corruption is still rampant. For example, recently, both the national and local sessions of the National People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference have been criticized for huge expenditure and exploitation of intensive labor, and this phenomenon is challenged even by the official media that call for change in the practice. The media in the mainland once estimated that the expenditure on food, accommodation and transport for the representatives of the sessions of the two congresses every year is at least over 100 million yuan. This year every deputy is given a free notebook, so the total direct expenditure will be 127 million yuan (3).

After attending the sessions, 5,224 deputies and committee members can take away the notebooks. The public is outrageous about this kind of 'generosity' as it abuses public money. Some scholars point out that in this sense, the deputies are corrupt in another way, under a beautiful name (4).

Officials of the administration system, or Chinese Communist Party members, are not only corrupt in everyday life, they also take advantage of their authority for making profits. There is a sharp increase of personal wealth. Many cadres get involved in doing business and then become one part of the Red Capitalists.

In big contrast, the majority of the working class has yet to share the fruits of the economic growth.

### Injustice of low-paid jobs for the working class

Over many years in the past, China's economy has rapidly increased with 8% or above, but the proportion of labor income in the GDP has continuously dropped for the last 22 years. It fell from 56.5% in 1983 to 36.7% in 2005, which was almost a decrease of 20%. In contrast, the proportion of capital income in the GDP has increased by 20%. According to a recent survey by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, 23.4% of workers have obtained no increase in their wages for the last five years. 75.2% of workers thought that the current social distribution of income was unfair. 61% of workers considered that workers were comparatively low paid, which was the most serious social injustice.

Zhang Jianguo, the head of Department of Collective Contract of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, pointed out that in recent years there have been a series of extreme cases of mass events caused by contradictions between capital and labor. The essential causes are low income and little benefit. Based on an unfinished two-year statistics, capital-labor disputes caused by problems of income distribution, social benefits and insurance has counted for 65% of cases, which is an important factor of endangering social stability (5).

Even the high ranking officials of the Chinese official trade union publicly recognize the problem. As there were serve discontents among the masses, it could be understood that the national union was under great pressure.

Now in China, the disparity of the rich and the poor is very serious. Some scholars stated that the gap between 10% of the population with the highest income and 10% of the population with the lowest income has increased from 7.3 times in 1988 to 23 times in 2007 (6). This is why this issue becomes the second public concern, according to the survey reported by People's Net. The workers are comparatively low paid which exacerbates social contradictions.

In reality, the mass incidents of capital-labor disputes are increasing (even if they are labeled as 'extreme cases' by the government).

In 2008, the author quoted a news report from Ming Pao, dated 15 March 2008, that 'according to the statistics of the Committee of Enterprises and Coordination of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, there were 406,000 cases of capital-labor disputes in 2007. The figure did not include the statistics of Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the juridical system. Zhang Mingqi, the vice chairman of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, disclosed that the number of capital-labor disputes rapidly spiraled, with an annual rate of 20% (for the details, please see October Review, No. 224).

In March 2010, Wang Shenghou, the head of Supreme People's Court, also publicly reported that in 2009, the courts at different levels have handled 317,000 cases of labor-capital disputes, with an increase of 10.8%.

In 2008, according to the data of China Labor Bulletin, the mass incidents of working class in China had reached 127,467 cases (quoted from October Review, no 227 ).

### Exacerbation of Social Contradictions

In some places, the working class used strikes to fight for wage increase and better working conditions. But some workers were desperate and committed suicide due to bad working conditions and always being under great working pressure. In Foxconn, a Taiwanese enterprise in Shenzhen, within four months, from 23 January to 26 May, 12 workers had committed suicide by jumping off the building, causing 10 deaths and 2 injured.

The enterprise is a typical capitalist corporation. There is rigid management of production, tightly controlling the workers. Its management is criticized for inhumane and high exploitation. Workers are considered as machines, without privacy in daily life. They are exhausted out of 12 working hours daily. The wages are merely around RMB 1000 but they always have to do overtime work. There is hierarchy within the corporation. The management do not pay respect to the workers, and always scold at and insult the workers. Worse still, the relationships among the workers are indifference. They not only have to endure the pressure of production, but also to work with such indifferent human relationships. All these led to the feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and despair among the workers. Not surprisingly, some of them committed suicide.

The suicides of Foxconn workers are only an iceberg of the plight of workers in China. Behind the booming economic growth of China, there exist plights and struggles of workers at the sweatshops.

The suicides also disclose the deeply rooted social contradictions. On the other hand, some innocent people were murdered out of any particular reason. Particularly, there were murder cases happening in primary schools, due to

bitter anger and revenge. From late March to mid May, there happened six cases of killings, leading to nearly 100 casualties.

Professor Hu Xingdou of Beijing Polytechnics University claimed that there were two reasons of social violence: one, the marginal and vulnerable social groups do not have access to make their complaints and appeals recognized; two, the mindset of taking revenge on society by the lowest stratum of society, through victimizing the most vulnerable groups.

In addition, there are numerous cases of “people getting insane out of official oppression”. In July 2009, a rural woman from Shaoxing Municipal of Zhejiang Province was under detention after making an appeal about demolition. Her house was demolished by the township government. Her daughter-in-law was too shocked and then became mentally disordered. Moreover, Ma Jiwen, a peasant from Luliang Municipal of Shanxi Province, appealed that his land was invaded. It turned out that the court sent him to jail based on “his crime of blackmailing the government”. If the conflicts between the government officials and ordinary people cannot be solved, there will appear more and more social violence.

After several cases of violent attacks on children, Wen Jiabao, the Premier of the State Council, stated that the government not only has to strengthen the security, but also to solve the underlying problems of social violence, such as to tackle social contradictions and disputes, as well as to reinforce the function of coordination at the ground level.

Being one of the top rulers of the country, the Premier would clearly understand the social situation and the origins of social conflicts. This is caused by the bureaucracy system which enables the bureaucrats to abuse the political and economic privileges and become corrupt. They adopt the path of capitalism which causes exploitation of workers, social polarization, the disparities between the rich and the poor, widespread unemployment, and escalating price of property estates. In addition, many government policies have worsened the situation. Therefore, if one wants to solve the above problems effectively, one should change the existing bureaucracy system completely.

26 May 2010

Notes:

- (1) Ming Pao, 4 January 2010
- (2) Wen Weipo, 24 May 2010
- (3) Wen Weipo, 13 May 2010
- (4) Apple Daily, 3 March 2010
- (5) Wen Weipo, 13 May 2010
- (6) Ming Pao, 14 May 2010