



Workers of Hengtong Factory Strike for Respect of their Rights

Wednesday, November 6, 2013

The following is a translation from a blog post by Dongjue Ke. You can find his post at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_6d5bc9c70101f11k.html

We strike only because we are workers with personality and dignity, not criminals in prison!

October 25, 2013

Founded in 1996 by Hong Kong investment, Shenzhen Hengtong Rubber Factory currently has over 500 employees. The factory installed surveillance cameras directed at the operators of each machine in the production facility without getting workers' consent in advance, severely infringing upon workers' dignity. As a result, these labor violations led to a strike. Most workers in the factory have been working there for more than 10 years, but they are never trusted or respected despite their years of hard work. Senior employees with over 10-years working experiences can only have the same monthly wage level as new workers, despite being required to do more difficult work than the new workers. In addition, because orders were sent to other factories, workers' overtime work was reduced and they only earned the 1600 RMB base wage each month. Some workers thought the factory intended to force senior workers to leave by installing these cameras and decreasing overtime work. Feeling frustrated and helpless, workers went on a strike to express their demands.

After six days of striking, 30 workers were fired by the factory. When some workers began to work on the 23rd, workers who were fired thought that the protest was over and they had been abandoned by other workers. However, after two days of silence, more than 400 workers organized a strike again to fight for their legal rights and support the workers who had been fired. Another 39 workers were fired today. The strengthening of workers' rights is inseparable from workers' consciousness and effort. We should support their continuing movement. The Following is a letter wrote by workers at Shenzhen Hengtong Rubber Factory.

A letter to all workers at Shenzhen Hengtong Rubber Factory

Dear brothers and sisters in Hengtong,

By the time you see this letter, workers in cutting department have been struggling for rights and dignity of all workers in the factory for more than a week. Although it has not been a long time, every step we took was filled with hardship and struggle. Like you, we are ordinary workers at Shenzhen Hengtong Rubber Factory. In order to contribute to the development of Hengtong, we are all working hard, watching it growing from a family workshop of over 20 people to a large-scale factory with hundreds of workers in the past ten years. The tremendous change and success of the factory couldn't have been made without workers' efforts. But through our hard work and frequent, we only earn meager income, barely allowing us to live in a prosperous city. We can hardly even maintain a decent and respectable life.

Indeed, most of us are unable to bring our children and parents to live together with us in Shenzhen and take the responsibility to look after them. When we left our hometowns to work here, we once had dreams to give our children and parents more decent and happier lives after years of hard work. However, every time we received these low salaries, those dreams seem out of reach. Recently, the factory reduced our overtime work. As a result, with the overtime wages deducted, we only earn the base wage of just over 1,000 RMB per month. Because our current salaries aren't enough for food, rent, the education of our children, and the care of our parents in Shenzhen, we hereby demand higher wages.

According to average living standards in several big cities indicated in a report released by National Bureau of Statistics of China in September, the minimum income to maintain a decent life in Shenzhen was 5,200 RMB per month. Of course, we understand that we are just people from another place in this city. You might even say that we are just migrant workers. But we are also human beings. We don't have any extravagant hope to receive 5,200 RMB ever month, but we believe that our work is worth a base wage of 2,000 RMB. This amount of compensation will reflect your respect in our hard work.

We have been tolerating low compensation for more than ten years. Apart from the request of higher wages, we also write to express our anger about our boss's disrespectful acts despite our hard work during these ten years. These ten years have not led to any trust or respect on the part of our boss. The boss even installed surveillance cameras inside the workshops to monitor our work and inspect whether we are working hard like his loyal servants. In addition, when some workers raised objections to these acts, the boss fired them. We think that our personal dignity was seriously infringed upon by being monitored and we demand to be respected. We are workers with dignity, not criminals in a prison. Moreover, it is illegal to fire workers. We hereby demand the factory reestablish labor

relations with the workers and compensate workers in compliance with Chinese laws.

Brothers and sisters in Hengtong, I'm not writing this letter to get your sympathy because we don't need it. You didn't participate in the strike and some of you participated at first, but gave up due to a number of reasons. I will not blame you for that because you have the right to make your own choices. However, I'm writing to tell you that we are not fighting for ourselves, but for the rights and dignity of all workers in the factory. The factory could illegally fire me today and illegally fire you tomorrow, unless you are willing to put down your dignity and personality and work like a farm animal. Although we came from different parts of China, we have become close to each other since working at Hengtong. I believe that with solidarity, nothing can get in the way of our goals.

Followings are our demands:

1. Remove the surveillance cameras installed in the production facilities; the factory must obtain workers' agreement before installing any monitoring equipment in the future.
2. Increase workers' monthly base wages from 1,600 RMB to 2,000 RMB per month.
3. Sign labor contracts with workers who don't have one, pay workers' unpaid social insurance fees. Protect workers' rights according to law.
4. Revoke the October 19 and 21 decisions to fire workers. Reestablish labor relations with 14 workers, including Wang Zhenhua, Wei Naicai, Li Yiliang, Liu Sunfeng, Xu Chengqi, Chen Yuan, Huang Linan, Wang Gang, Huang Lidong, Li hanzhong, Xu Jinrong, Ye Wenqing, Hu Rihua, Zhu Xiaoquan, or give them severance pay according to their seniority.

Workers of Shenzhen Hengtong Rubber Factory

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