

# JUL/SEP 2016

## Walmart Workers on Strike

In July, the struggle of Walmart workers in China entered a new stage. Early that month, Walmart workers at retail stores in Nanchang, Chengdu, and Harbin staged wildcat strikes against the company's new working-hour system (see Anita Chan in *Made in China* 2/2016). Dozens of workers from each of these stores participated in the strikes, holding signs, and chanting slogans inside the Walmart premises. The strikes were co-ordinated via workers' online networks facilitated by the Walmart Chinese Workers Association, an informal group led by former employees of the company. *The Financial Times* reports that there were forty such WeChat groups with about twenty thousand members, roughly a fifth of Walmart's workforce in China. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) neither organised nor intervened in the strikes. Workers ended their protest only after management promised a response, but so far the company is still pushing for the new working hour system to be adopted in its retail stores. These strikes represent a rare instance of cross-regional labour organisation leading to work stoppages. Since July, individual Walmart workers have taken the company to arbitration on issues related to the new working-hour system.

(Sources: **China Labor Bulletin**, **The Financial Times**, **Xinjing Bao**)

## Second Anniversary of Zhou Jianrong's Suicide

On 17 July, Chinese labour activists commemorated the second anniversary of the death of Zhou Jianrong, a 49-year-old worker at a Hong Kong-owned footwear factory in Shenzhen. Two years ago, Zhou committed suicide by jumping out of her dormitory after being fired for her role in organising a strike. Since May 2014, Zhou and her co-workers had been struggling with the management over the issue of compensation following the company's ownership restructuring. They were concerned they would lose out. In the protracted struggle, more than one hundred workers were fired by management. On 16 July, the day before the suicide, the company had fired another sixteen activist workers, including Zhou. In Shenzhen, it would have been extremely difficult for female workers over the age of forty to find any factory work, and the loss of her job deeply distressed Zhou. Two years later, her death is not forgotten. A candlelight vigil was held in the office of a labour NGO in Guangzhou with more than a dozen former worker representatives and activists from Zhou's factory. They proposed to mark 17 July as the 'Day of Suffering of Chinese Workers.'

(Sources: **Caixin**, **Radio Free Asia**)



PC: RADIO FREE ASIA

## Mounting Concerns about the Impact of the Economic Slowdown on Wage Growth

In mid-July, China's National Bureau of Statistics issued a report warning that sustaining economic and wage growth will be a challenge in the second half of 2016. In particular, the report cited industrial overcapacity in the state-owned coal and steel sectors, and declining agricultural prices as contributing factors. In the first half of this year, inflation-adjusted disposable household income rose 6.5 percent, barely keeping pace with economic growth at 6.7 percent. However, in anticipation of slowing economic growth, the Chinese government has taken measures to moderate wage growth. The deputy director of China's Bureau of Social Security and Human Resources, Xin Changxing, maintains that if Chinese companies are to remain competitive, the frequency and scale of wage adjustment should be slowed. In the first half of 2016, only six regions in China increased their local minimum wage, compared to thirteen regions in 2015. The average minimum wage increase is also slower: only 11 percent compared to 13.5 percent in the previous year. Mirroring the minimum wage adjustment, local governments' annual guidelines for workplace salaries similarly propose slower wage growth. In addition, in August, the powerful National Development and Reform Commission released a document that described the relatively large amounts provided by the social insurance scheme as undermining the competitiveness of China's manufacturing industry. This comes after sixteen provinces slightly reduced the percentage of social insurance contributions in the first half of 2016 in an effort to drive down labour costs.

(Sources: **Caixin**, **Jinghua Shibao**, **The South China Morning Post**, **Zhongguo Jingji Zhoukan**, **21 Shiji Jingji Baodao**)



PC: SCMP

## Wukan Sieged and Conquered

On 19 June, hundreds of residents in the southern fishing village of Wukan, Guangdong province, returned to the street five years after protests had flared up against official corruption and land grabbing. The protesting villagers demanded the release of Village Chief Lin Zuluan, who had been detained on 18 June for his persistent advocacy for land rights. Lin had been elected as chief of the village committee and Party secretary after he and others led a massive village protest in 2011 that secured a concession to hold democratic village elections. The land issue at the heart of the protest, however, had become increasingly difficult to resolve. Frustrated, Lin attempted to mobilise villagers to collectively petition the government, but he was detained shortly afterwards. Following the detention of his grandson and having been denied access to his lawyers, Lin confessed to bribery charges. After his confession was taped and broadcasted on state television, he was sentenced to thirty-seven months in prison. For almost three months, villagers held daily public demonstrations. On 13 September, riot police broke into the village to detain thirteen villagers accused of inciting a mob and disrupting public order. The police were met with resistance by villagers, and with many injured; however, since this time the protest has subsided.

(Sources: **The Initium**, **The New York Times**, **BBC**)



PC: YOUTUBE

## Flurry of Legislative Activity on Civil Society Organisations

After the passing of the Charity Law and the highly controversial Foreign NGOs Law earlier this year (see Ivan Franceschini and Elisa Nesossi in *Made in China 2/2016*), over the summer, the Chinese authorities have continued to move forward with the revision of legislation related to the management of civil society organisations. Since June, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has issued draft registration and management regulations for public comment for all three types of social organisations legally recognised in China: foundations (*jijinhui*), social service organisations (*shehui fuwu jigou*), and social association (*shehui tuanti*). As long-time observer of Chinese civil society Shawn Shieh has pointed out in his blog *NGOs in China*, ‘these three sets of regulations form the heart of the regulatory system governing the registration and management of social organisations—China’s equivalent of not-for-profit organisations.’ Complementary administrative regulations in either draft, provisional, or final form have also been concurrently released. The rationale behind the new legislation is spelled out in an ‘Opinion’ jointly released by the General Office of the Communist Party’s Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council on 21 August. According to this document, the overall goal of the reform is to see that by 2020 China will have achieved ‘the complete and sound building of a Chinese-style social organisation management system that features unified registration, with each undertaking their own duties, coordination and cooperation, responsibilities according to level, and oversight on the basis of the law.’ In the new legal and political environment, ‘government and social organisations [will be] separate, powers and obligations [will be] clear, and self-regulation [will be] practiced in line with the law,’ but at the same time ‘Party organisations [will be] playing a more obvious role.’

(Sources: **China Law Translate 1**, **China Law Translate 2**, **NGOs in China**, **Central Government Website**)

## Panyu Labour Activists Sentenced, Lu Yuyu Beaten in Jail

On 26 September, the Panyu district court in Guangzhou held separate hearings for labour activists Zeng Feiyang, Zhu Xiaomei, and Tang Huanxing. Zeng was sentenced to three years imprisonment, suspended for four years, for ‘gathering a crowd to disturb social order’, while Zhu and Tang received prison sentences of eighteen months, suspended for two years, for the same charge. The case of Meng Han, another activist who refused to cooperate with the judicial authorities, was sent back to the police for further investigation (he already had a previous conviction back in 2014 for organising hospital security guards). All activists worked for the Panyu Migrant Workers Centre, an outspoken labour NGO based in Guangzhou that has, over the past few years, distinguished itself for taking on several high profile collective cases. After being arrested in a coordinated crackdown against labour activists in early December 2015, Zeng and his colleagues were formally accused of ‘gathering a crowd to disturb social order.’ While Zhu and Tang were released on bail after a few weeks, Zeng and Meng remained under detention without trial for almost ten months. Worrying news has also emerged about blogger Lu Yuyu, chronicler of protests in China, and his girlfriend and collaborator Li Tingyu who have been detained since 15 June. On 31 August, Lu met his lawyer at the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture Detention Centre, and told him that he had been beaten by officers and was suffering from sleep deprivation after having been exposed to strong light at night. Amnesty International has called for urgent action in support of Lu and Li.

(Sources: **Amnesty International**, **China Labor Bulletin**, **The New York Times**)

