

iPhone workers go on strike in China

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Hundreds of workers who make iPhones at the Foxconn factory in Shanxi Province, China have gone on strike demanding better pay and conditions. Foxconn, who employ over a million workers in China to make consumer electronics such as the iPhone for Western companies, has faced growing criticism in the media due to poor employment conditions leading to suicides.

Foxconn operates as a manufacturing outsourcing company for American, European, Korean and Japanese companies in China. By exporting the manufacturing process to a country where average wages are lower these companies make high profits selling goods. By using Foxconn as a supplier they can deflect criticism of poor working conditions and pay by claiming a degree of independence from such decisions, while in reality the only reason they are using Foxconn is to drive down wages and conditions more than they would be able to do as a direct employer.

The growing media criticism originally came from workers at a large Foxconn factory (where they were also housed and in effect spent all their time) committing suicide. This led to Foxconn increasing the wages paid, likely on instruction from Apple in an attempt to end the negative media coverage.

The strike today seems to relate directly to this, as the workers are striking as a promised pay rise has only been given to managers and technicians but not the vast majority of the workforce. A worker starting there is only paid 1,550 yuan (about £155) a month.

China is a highly secretive and authoritarian state, not unlike Tsarist Russia in this and the concentration of workforce into large factories. While such factories such as the Foxconn plant and in Tsarist Russia the Putilov works at times might seem like scenes from Dante's inferno, the sheer size and concentration of workforce makes them key sites for the class struggle.

This strike, while apparently not including the entire factory, shows that despite the repression there are militant workers willing to risk their livelihood and even lives for their class.

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