

University authorities suppress student protest in China

By Peter Symonds
29 December 2018

Students at the prestigious Peking University yesterday held a protest against the decision by university authorities to suppress the Marxist student society. While the demonstration only involved about a dozen students peacefully chanting holding up placards, university guards quickly moved in to break it up and drag the protesters away.

“Give us back our Marxist student society, resist violence on campus,” the students chanted. Witnesses told the *South China Morning Post* that the students had locked arms. Some were injured as security guards forced them into a building, manhandling and in some cases carrying them inside.

“Several of them were pushed to the ground and suffered cuts to their hands and some had their glasses broken in the struggle,” according to one witness. At least eight of the students were still being held yesterday evening.

The protest followed the restructuring of the Marxist student society by university authorities to ensure it was firmly under their political control. It replaced the society’s leaders, including its president Qui Zhanxuan, and installed some 32 new members, many of whom were members of the Communist Youth League or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The immediate pretext for the society’s suppression was an attempt by Qui to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the birth of former CCP leader Mao Zedong on December 26 1893. He had invited students throughout the country to take part in online events to mark the occasion.

Qui was detained by police on Tuesday, given a written warning for “disrupting campus order” and then released on Thursday. He was among the students protesting yesterday and is still being held.

Members of the Marxist student society at Peking

University and students from other Chinese elite universities have recently been supporting workers in their struggles. In particular, students have been involved in assisting workers from Jasic Technology, a manufacturer of hi-tech welding equipment in Shenzhen, trying to establish an independent trade union.

The Chinese police have repeatedly cracked down on the workers and students involved in the Jasic Technology dispute. These include Zhang Shengye, a recent Peking University graduate, who was detained last month by “men in black clothing” on campus last month.

Around 15 students and recent graduates are still in detention after their arrest earlier in the year, according to the Jasic Workers’ Solidarity Group. Four have been denied access to their lawyers.

A similar attempt was made in September to suppress the Marxist student society at Peking University, but authorities backed off after their manoeuvre to deregister the group was exposed.

The CCP regime, which has all but abandoned its socialistic phrase-mongering, is terrified at the prospect of students politicizing the struggles of workers. The CCP represents the interests the super-wealthy oligarchs who have been profiting from the processes of capitalist restoration since 1978 and is well aware that it is sitting on top of a social time bomb. Over the past 40 years, the social gulf between rich and poor has widened immensely, generating huge social tensions that now threaten to erupt as the country’s economy slows markedly.

The CCP is determined to prevent a recurrence of the nation-wide protests that erupted in 1989 after students demonstrated in Tiananmen Square. The turning point in the protests came after they were joined by workers

voicing their own class grievances. The regime violently suppressed the protest in Beijing and other cities. The repression was a signal to foreign investors that the CCP use all means to police the working class and capital flooded into the country.

Amid a vastly expanded working class, the fear in Beijing today is that joint action by students and workers today could trigger a political movement that would rapidly undermine the ruling regime.

In a social media post this week, the Jasic Workers' Solidarity Group called on its members to take part in commemorations of Mao's birth. "A wave of progressive students has emerged, who remember well Chairman Mao's lesson: that the youth must walk a road that meets with the workers," it stated.

A rights activist in Beijing, Li Wei, told Radio Free Asia: "In the past couple of years we have seen a lot of support for the Maoist left among ordinary people, especially because of the economy; they feel that life is very hard now, and they look back to supposedly greater equality of the Mao era."

While the widespread hostility to the regime and worsening social conditions is understandable, the turn to Maoism provides no solution. Far from being based on Marxism, Mao's eclectic ideology was a mixture of peasant populism and Chinese patriotism combined with the reactionary Stalinist ideology of "socialism in one country."

The "greater equality" previously was a product of the immense social upheaval of the 1949 Chinese Revolution. But it was led into a dead-end by Mao, who opened the door to capitalist restoration through his rapprochement with US imperialism.

Considerable attention is being paid in the US to the Chinese student activists, not only by Washington's propaganda arms such as Radio Free Asia. Cornell University has suspended two student exchanges with Renmin University in Beijing expressing concerns over academic freedom and the rights of students. The Washington-based Human Rights Watch has issued a statement calling for the release of detained students.

Washington's interest in the student activities is not motivated by concern for "human rights," but rather is part of the escalating US confrontation with China across the board—diplomatically, economically and militarily—to ensure continued US global dominance.

Workers and students in China and internationally

should demand the release of Chinese student and worker activists and defend their basic democratic rights against the police-state regime. However, that needs to be guided by a socialist and internationalist perspective that requires the revival of genuine Marxism—that is, of Trotskyism—in China.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>