

China's Jobless Crisis Blossoms

Riots rocked northeast China last month as tens of thousands of industrial workers filled the streets, protesting unpaid wages and joblessness in the world's largest state run economy.

Police responded with force, jailing workers, torturing labor activists and using official state media to conceal the growing economic crisis.

While the government in Beijing touts full employment goals for the nation of 2 billion, analysts estimate unemployment in China will surpass 20 million within four years. Millions more are expected to lose their jobs in the wake of that country's recent entry in to the World Trade Organization.

The latest figures on unemployment in China cite 25.5 million factory workers laid off by state firms since 1998 as part of a government effort to overhaul the state run economy. The same report indicated only 17 million workers found new jobs.

China's long record of denying human and labor rights is well known and the freedom of workers to assemble, protest and form labor unions is tightly controlled. Labor activists in China are routinely jailed. According to a recent report by Amnesty International, a factory worker was held in a psychiatric hospital for months and forcibly given drugs and shock treatment after attempting to form a union.

In addition to massive layoffs in China's industrial sector, unemployment in rural areas is skyrocketing. Millions of agricultural workers are out of work and adding to the pressure on China's nascent social security system.

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