

Instances, such as the one at the Shuangfeng Textile Factory, are cause for great concern. People in China are crying out for justice and they must not be ignored. I urge President Bush to raise this issue with the leadership of China and work with them to help improve the situation. More over, the President should press China to improve its labor, environment, and human rights record in general. It is important for us to take advantage of our dialogue with China to help put an end to the suffering of so many people.

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 21, 2002]

“HIGH TIDE” OF LABOR UNREST IN CHINA
STRIKING WORKERS RISE ARREST TO PROTEST
PAY CUTS, CORRUPTION

(By Philip P. Pan)

DAFENG, CHINA.—On the fourth night of the strike, management cut off the heat. The 2,000 workers occupying the Shuangfeng Textile Factory responded by huddling together and wrapping themselves in thick blankets and surplus military coats. Even as the temperature neared freezing, they refused to leave.

Not long ago, banners on the factory walls reminded workers they were “masters” of the Communist state. Now, the same workers were camped on a cold floor between rows of rusty spinning machines, nursing their grievances over boiled water and biscuits.

Mostly middle-aged women, they spoke quietly of pay cuts and worthless stock shares, of corrupt officials and missing pension funds, of being cheated in China’s rough-and-tumble transition from socialism to capitalism.

They spoke, too, of the risks they were taking by fighting back.

Three times, police had tried to expel them from the factory, dragging women out by the hair, jabbing others with electric batons. Three times, the workers had managed to hold on. Now, there were rumors a military police unit had been summoned to this small city 150 miles north of Shanghai.

“We know this is dangerous,” said one young woman sitting in a corner of the vast factory floor near large spools of white cotton yarn. “But it’s too late to be scared now.”

Then, glancing out a window, she added nervously: “The police should be here soon.”

The battle in Dafeng, which began Dec. 16 and ended less than two weeks later in defeat for the workers, is part of a larger story playing out across China’s fast-changing industrial landscape. Two decades after the ruling Communist Party adopted capitalist economic reforms while continuing to restrict political freedom, growing numbers of Chinese workers are risking arrest to stage strikes, sit-downs and other demonstrations.

In many ways, these protests are acts of desperation by people struggling to survive without the help of effective labor unions, courts or other institutions that provide checks and balances in a market economy.

As thousands of state factories are closed or sold, workers who once were promised lifetime job security and benefits now face mass layoffs and, sometimes, the loss of their savings to corrupt managers. Their willingness to fight back presents a thorny political problem for a party that has always staked its legitimacy on providing a better life for the working class.

It is difficult to estimate how often these protests occur, in part because local officials often try to conceal them from their superiors.

But one recent government report acknowledges the country is in the midst of a “high tide” of labor unrest, with the number of workers participating in strikes more

than doubling in the first half of the 1990s alone. Another report in an internal party publication said there were 30,000 protests of significant size in 2000, or more than 80 incidents per day.

The authorities often respond to these protests by trying to appease the workers; at other times they react with force, sending in police and jailing the most outspoken demonstrators.

“We have no idea what’s going to happen next,” the young woman in the factory here said that night as the strike wore on. Like many interviewed for this report, she asked not to be identified out of fear she would be arrested. “The government doesn’t want to back down, and neither do we.”

A SECRET BANKRUPTCY

The Shuangfeng Textile Factory lies on the outskirts of Dafeng, a quick drive from the city’s glittering downtown into a dreary neighborhood of run-down buildings and dirt alleyways. Off the main roadway, past a row of ramshackle shops, a large crowd of workers gathers in front of the factory’s creaky metal gate.

There is no picket line, just a group of men and women in heavy coats milling about restlessly in the middle of the road, stamping their feet to keep warm under a pale yellow street lamp. Their faces are lined from years of squinting while operating spinning machines and, more recently, from lack of sleep. Some of the workers are smoking; others have been drinking. Every time a car drives by, the crowd gets jittery.

Past the gate is the factory itself, a deteriorating complex built in 1931, before the Communist revolution. It is the city’s oldest and largest textile mill, one of several in this cotton-growing region that produces yarn and cloth for the nation’s garment factories.

In the mid-1990s, Beijing began pushing local officials to either get rid of small, money-losing state firms like the mill or make them profitable. What followed was a disorderly process in which the government often sold stock in factories to the workers, but retained control as the majority shareholder. China’s Communist rulers had not yet embraced full privatization.

“Some people invested willingly. Others didn’t think it was a good idea. But in the end, we all handed over the money,” said one worker in the spinning division. “If we didn’t give them the money, we would lose our jobs.”

Last November, the company suddenly and secretly filed for bankruptcy. The factory boss and several other managers emerged as the firm’s new owners. The workers discovered what had happened only weeks later, when a local newspaper published a short item about the transaction.

They immediately suspected they had been victim of a “fake bankruptcy,” a common phenomenon in China in which corrupt managers hide a factory’s assets, declare bankruptcy and then purchase the firm themselves at a reduced price, often with money they have embezzled.

The man who gained the most in the bankruptcy was Shi Yongsheng, the mill’s manager and now its largest shareholder, according to workers and local officials. Shi was appointed to run the mill only three years ago after a career managing several smaller state factories in Dafeng, including a tannery and a fur plant.

Residents describe him as a close friend of one of the city’s deputy party secretaries. Workers said he bragged to other managers about his plan to slash salaries. Shi did not return telephone calls, and a government spokesman said Shi was too busy to speak to reporters.

But a company document obtained by workers showed that the factory owed them

\$14 million, including \$2 million for the shares they had purchased and \$3 million they had paid toward their pensions. In addition, the document said, the government had provided the factory with nearly \$8 million to help it cover its debts to workers and provide those laid off with welfare payments.

A government official in Dafeng confirmed the figures were accurate. Where all that money went, though, remains a mystery.

“What happened to our money? How did we go bankrupt?” asked one longtime employee, who asked that he be identified only by his surname, Zhang. “We had a lot of questions. No one gave us any answers.”

STRIKE WITHOUT SLOGANS

Instead of an explanation, the workers got a pay cut. On Dec. 13, managers began calling in employees and demanding they sign new contracts slashing their salaries by half, to between \$25 and \$40 a month.

The workers revolted. In a meeting, an employee tore up the contract in front of her supervisors, workers said. In another, a worker denounced factory managers, saying, “Officials live off the labor of the workers!”

With resistance rising, the company tried to make an example of two outspoken employees in the spinning division, young mothers named Chen Feng and Liu Landing. On the morning of Dec. 16, the factory hung a large poster on the front gate declaring that “the two comrades have separated from their posts and from the factory.”

“I had worked in the mill for seven or eight years, and I have an 11-year-old child to support,” said Chen, 29, by telephone several weeks later. “So, of course, I was depressed.” Chen declined to discuss why she was fired, but she confirmed what happened next: “The workers went on strike, and they asked the company to let me go back to work.”

A strike is a sensitive undertaking in China. The Communist Party has always portrayed itself as a workers’ party, and it still teaches schoolchildren how Mao Zedong launched his career by organizing strikes among miners and railway workers. But the government has also absorbed the lesson of how strikes helped bring down Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

HONORING DAN TIDWELL AND JAMIE MIZE

HON. KEN BENTSEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Dan Tidwell and Jamie Mize. On February 16, 2002, Diverse Works Artspace, will host its Illumination Gala which will honor Dan and Jamie as two of Houston’s most enlightened contemporary art champions. Diverse Works Artspace is a non-profit art center dedicated to presenting new visual, performing, and literary art. Known for its ground-breaking artistic education programs, Diverse Works is one of the most prominent contemporary art centers in the United States. Diverse Works serves as a venue for artistic exploration and audience development.

Dan Tidwell and Jamie Mize are longtime businessmen and philanthropists who pioneered the revitalization of Houston’s Historic Downtown District. In 1978, Dan and Jamie opened their first restaurant, Treebeards, in Houston’s historic Market Square as a tiny establishment hosting only 30 guests. Today,

Treebeards has grown to four locations in both downtown Houston and Dallas and in 1999 was named “Best Downtown Restaurant” by the readers of the Houston Press. The rebuilding of the Treebeards’ Market Square location marked one of the many restoration endeavors taken on by the pair. In 1999, they reconstructed the Scholbo building, rebuilt the canopy and restored the facade of the 1861 Baker-Myer Building.

Dan and Jamie have both served as Chair of the Downtown Historic District Board. In an effort to rejuvenate downtown Houston, they have provided direction to neighboring businesses on issues ranging from building design to parking management. Jamie currently serves as a member of the Design Review/Grants Committee, which awards facade rehabilitation matching grants to property owners and tenants. Additionally, he chaired the committee on Parking Management, as a result of their work, the City of Houston has adopted a Valet Ordinance. In collaboration with Diverse Works, Dan and Jamie designed Market Square Park, which features historic photographs and fragments of long demolished buildings.

In addition to serving as Chair of the Downtown Historic District Board and managing an establishment, Dan and Jamie have been actively involved in humanitarian efforts. Their exceptional leadership in the community has earned the respect of many in both the business and civic communities. They have contributed to the improvement of our community by providing countless meals for charity events, volunteering for Diverse Works Galas, and feeding the hungry through the End Hunger Network.

No one has done more to improve Houston’s Historic Market Square District than Dan and Jamie. Through their exemplary model of community activism, they were named “Downtowners” of the Year 1999,” awarded two “Gold Brick Awards” from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and received the highest honor for historic preservation from the American Planning Association, Houston Affiliation.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great honor that I congratulate my friends, Dan Tidwell and Jamie Mize, on the occasion of their being recognized for their significant commitment to the Arts.

CENTRAL NEW JERSEY HONORS
CENTENARIAN JEANETTE GIUNCO

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Central New Jersey centenarian, Ms. Jeanette Giunco, a resident of Freehold, NJ celebrating her one-hundredth birthday on Sunday, February 17, 2002.

Born to Elizabeth Seckler and Joseph Schmidt in Mulhouse, in the Province of Alsace-Lorraine, Germany, Ms. Giunco was one of eight children. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, Alsace-Lorraine was a disputed region between France and Germany. As a result of the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1981, the region returned to France. It is interesting to note that during World War II, her brother August repaired General Eisenhower’s automobile and shook his hand during the European Conflict.

Ms. Giunco came to the United States in 1926 where she lived in New York City and took her first—and according to her, her best—job, as a companion speaking French to a businessman’s family as she was fluent in German, French, Alsation and English. Another job as a companion and housekeeper moved her to Belmar, New Jersey in 1927 to work for the Strauss family.

During that same year, Jeanette married a local Belmar merchant, Mr. Albert P. Giunco. Albert’s family had operated various businesses in Belmar since the 1870s and by 1927, Albert and his brothers ran a series of food markets, liquor stores and butcher shops in the Monmouth County shore area. Jeanette and Albert had two children, John and Richard. Currently, Ms. Giunco is the proud grandmother of eight and great-grandmother of nine.

Ms. Giunco was involved with many civic organizations such as the Belmar Women’s Club and Fitkin Hospital—now know as the Jersey Shore Medical Center. Fitkin Hospital recognized her for over 2,000 hours of volunteer service.

Ms. Giunco has traveled extensively, visiting Europe as well as travels throughout the United States, Canada and South America.

As a proud citizen of the United States, Ms. Giunco has exercised her rights throughout the years, particularly carrying out her right to vote. She reflects that the World Wars and

particularly the attack on Pearl Harbor were significant events and has found particular fascination with the fact that when she was born, airplanes and rockets were but a dream and yet less than 70 years later there was a man walking on the moon. Ms. Giunco regrets the recent terrorist attacks against the United States and has prayed for peace throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, again, I rise to celebrate and honor this Central New Jersey centenarian and I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Ms. Jeanette Giunco and celebrating her one hundredth birthday on Sunday, February 17, 2002.

TRIBUTE TO JOHNNIE THOMPSON

HON. JAMES E. CLYBURN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Johnnie Thompson of South Carolina, a decorated combat veteran of the Korean War who, after retiring from the Army, served for twenty-two years as an elected official on the City Council of Walterboro, South Carolina.

Over the years he has maintained a commitment to veterans of the armed forces. In 1989, he co-chaired a committee that established a Colleton County Veterans Monument to honor all of Colleton County’s fallen veterans from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

In 1993 he was instrumental in bringing back the renowned Tuskegee Airmen who trained for combat in Walterboro, South Carolina, and the Governor awarded the Order of the Palmetto to each of the Tuskegee Airmen who attended. These events brought worldwide attention to Walterboro and to the State of South Carolina. Under Mr. Thompson’s leadership a World War II Memorial Park was dedicated and the Tuskegee Airmen Monument was unveiled at the Walterboro Airport in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my colleagues to join me today in honoring Johnnie Thompson for the outstanding service he has provided the U.S. Army, the state of South Carolina, and his beloved Walterboro Community. I sincerely thank Mr. Thompson for his contributions and wish him the best in all of his future endeavors.