

China : Five labour activists released after 15 months in detention

Sunday 10 May 2020, by [China Labour Bulletin](#) (Date first published: 9 May 2020).

Five well-known labour activists returned home Thursday evening, more than 15 months after they were arrested in a coordinated police raid on 21 January 2019.

<https://clb.org.hk/content/well-known-labour-activists-detained-shenzhen-police>

The families and associates of Wu Guijun, Zhang Zhiru, Jian Hui, Song Jiahui and He Yuancheng have confirmed that all five activists are now safely back home and in good spirits.

The activists were all charged with gathering a crowd to disturb public order (聚众扰乱公共秩序). Following a closed-door trial, Zhang Zhiru and Wu Guijun were sentenced to three years imprisonment, suspended for four years. Jian Hui, Song Jiahui and He Yuancheng were sentenced to 18 months, suspended for two years.

It is understood that the activists were actually released on 24 April but because of the continued Covid-19 outbreak, they had to spend 14 days in quarantine before returning home. Their families were unaware of their release or the fact that they had been sentenced until they actually returned home on 7 May.

The families had hired defence lawyers following the arrest of the five activists last year by the Bao'an District Public Security Bureau in Shenzhen. However, the authorities put immense pressure on the detainees to dismiss their chosen lawyers and accept state-appointed lawyers instead. As such, the families were unable to get any timely information related to the progress of their cases.

While the release of the five activists is very welcome news, it must be stressed that several other labour activists are still in some form of detention or restricted movement, and none of those released have been allowed to resume their valuable work assisting workers in need.

The five activists released on Thursday had all played key roles in China's workers' movement during the 2010s.

<https://clb.org.hk/content/shenzhen-authorities-drop-charges-against-labour-activist-wu-guijun>

Wu Guijun first came to light as an activist in 2013 when he organized workers at Hong Kong-owned furniture maker Diweixin in Shenzhen in protest at the company's refusal to discuss compensation for the planned closure and relocation of the factory.

He was detained for more than a year before being released without charge in June 2014 (see photo below). At which point, he began his career as an independent activist helping factory workers in the city to claim social insurance and other entitlements.

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/100000004269482/china-labor-strike-wu-guijun.html>

Zhang Zhiru has been one of the most prominent labour activists in Shenzhen for the past decade. After working on construction sites and assembly lines in his home province of Hunan for many years, Zhang founded the Chunfeng Labour Dispute Service Centre in 2007. The centre was involved in numerous labour disputes during the 2010s and guided thousands of workers through collective

bargaining with their employers. The centre even won praise from state-run media outlet Global Times in 2014.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/882289.shtml>

Jian Hui worked at Chunfeng during this period, while He Yuancheng was the former editor of the Collective Bargaining Forum (集体协商论坛). Song Jiahui was formerly a worker at the Lide Shoe factory in Guangzhou and was elected worker representative in arguably the most successful collective bargaining case in the recent history of the workers' movement in China.

<https://clb.org.hk/content/lide-shoe-factory-workers'-campaign-relocation-compensation>

It should be stressed that all this success was achieved without the assistance of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). As China Labour Bulletin's Executive Director, Han Dongfang pointed out:

If China's official trade union had been more inclusive and worked together with these civil society activists, the benefit for workers would have been even greater. This is an important lesson that the union still needs to learn, and we urge the ACFTU to do just that so as to avoid unnecessary drama in the future.

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<https://www.clb.org.hk/content/five-labour-activists-released-after-15-months-detention>