


**NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT**



金山集团  
超霸公司  
人事经理

# **NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT**

A Documentation of Chinese Battery  
Women Workers' Struggle for Health and Dignity

# **“No Choice but to Fight!”**

*A documentation of battery women workers' struggle  
for health and dignity*

**Globalization Monitor**



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A documentation of battery women workers' struggle for health and dignity

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This building, the Foreign Investment Service Centre,  
is owned by the Huizhou Government.



"No Choice but to Fight!"



The GP Battery is a famous brand in Hong Kong. It is also sold all over the world under different brand names.



Gold Peak Head Office in Kwai Chung, Hong Kong.



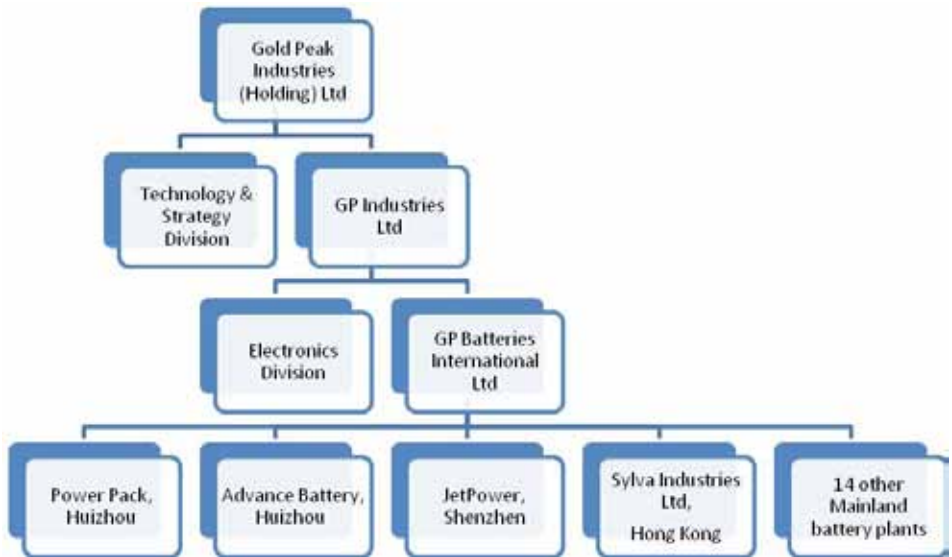
Mr. Victor Lo, CEO of GP, former member of the Executive Council of HK Government.

Source: Website of HK Government.

### Power Pack in Huizhou



## GOLD PEAK STRUCTURE

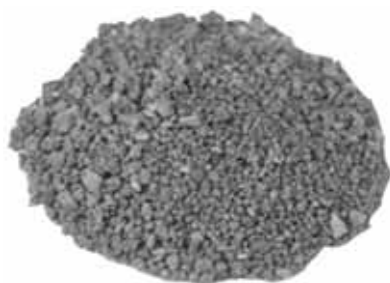




# Ni-Cd Battery



- ① Cadmium (negative electrode)
- ② Separator
- ③ Nickel (positive electrode)



Cadmium Stones

Cadmium Oxide Powder



"No Choice but to Fight!"

### Advance Battery in Huizhou



A worker, with his bare hands, was processing cadmium into electric plate. His mask was sub-standard. Photo taken by Power Pack workers in early 2004.





Workers' hands were covered with cadmium dust.

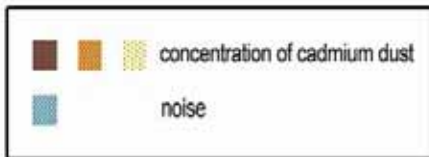
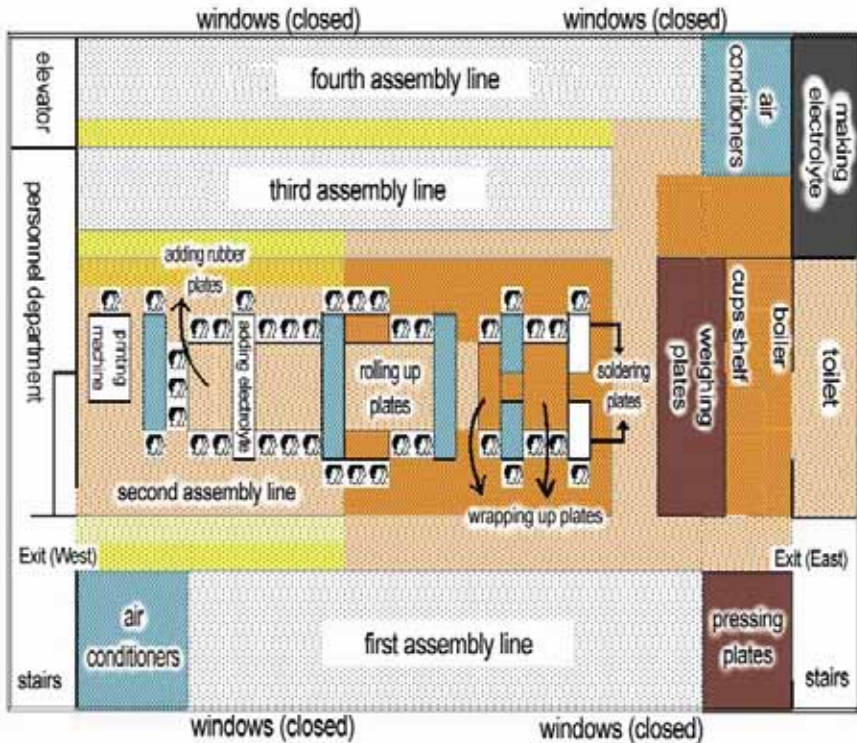
Dust was around the machine when processing the battery shell. Photo taken in Power Pack in early 2004.



"No Choice but to Fight!"



Power Pack's assembly line. Workers' masks were improved after they stood up for their rights.



Note: This diagram only provides details of the second assembly line. The other three lines were similar to the second assembly line, except they did not have printing machine.

Assembly shop of the Power Pack as seen by workers



"No Choice but to Fight!"



JetPower women workers demonstrated against the company. The placard they were holding reads: "Cadmium Poisoned Workers."



Power Pack Factory Trade Union Card. The sentence reads: "Proletarians of the World, Unite!"



Dormitory of Advance Battery







Hong Kong groups staged a protest in GP headquarters in July 2004.

GP worker protesting against the company. She was wearing a shirt with the words “The personnel manager Lan Jian told cadmium poisoned workers to jump from a height”.



"No Choice but to Fight!"



Ex-GP workers protested against the humiliating way of taking urine samples when they went back to the factory for medical examination in December 2004.



Dormitory card of Fu Hongqin. Fu died of kidney failure in 2004 after working 2 years for Power Pack. Her father sued the company for failing to pay for her medical expenses, and succeeded to claim a compensation of 26,500 yuan.



January 2007, workers at the battery factory of Panasonic in Wuxi also found out they were affected by cadmium.



On Jan 4-9, 2007 Panasonic workers in Wuxi took to the street to protest against the company. They were beaten up and sent back to factory.

"No Choice but to Fight!"



Members of Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links in Japan staged a solidarity action with the Wuxi Panasonic workers.

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# Abbreviation

ACFTU:

*All China Federation of Trade Unions*

ACWF:

*All China Women's Federation*

Advance Battery:

*Huizhou Advance Battery Technology Company Limited*

CCTV

*China Central Television*

GP/Gold Peak:

*Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Limited*

Gold Peak Industries:

*Gold Peak Industries Limited*

Gold Peak Batteries:

*Gold Peak Batteries International Limited*

Guangdong Hospital:

*Guangdong Provincial Hospital for Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases*

JetPower:

*Shenzhen JetPower Batteries Limited*

Power Pack:

*Huizhou Power Pack Company Limited*

SAWS

*State Administration of Work Safety*

WMB:

*Wuxi Matsushita Battery Company Limited*

# Preface

This book is about the struggle of the Gold Peak Batteries workers in China to defend their health and other rights. In 2004, four subsidiary factories of the Gold Peak Battery International Limited in Huizhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong were found to have more than 400 workers contaminated with cadmium, a toxic chemical used in battery production. Many of the workers were later diagnosed with cadmium poisoning. They have since stood up to fight for their rights. This book is a record of their brave struggle. However, this is not merely a third person narrative--it is to certain extent a narrative by the workers themselves. We invited two women workers to write two chapters to tell their stories, and this book as a whole is possible only because we conducted intensive interviews with almost 50 workers. We have tried our best to let the workers speak for themselves.

However, the purpose of our research goes beyond this. The GP case is different from the countless spontaneous strikes in the Pearl River Delta because its impact has gone beyond the boundaries of a local incident. Not long after the struggle was triggered in December 2003, it soon proceeded from the district level of Huizhou City up to the Municipal Government, and then continued to spread upward to the Provincial Government and finally the Ministries of the Central Government. At one point the Ministry of Health had to send specialists to Huizhou to supervise the Municipal Government in dealing with the case. Just over three weeks later, twenty eight worker representatives headed to Beijing to petition the Central Government, which created such anxiety among local officials that they endeavored to find ways to stop them. The further the story develops, the more obvious are the constraints placed on the workers by the authoritarian government and the nineteenth century-style factory system.

This story does not just reveal how one company and the local government worked together to repress workers' rights and how the latter's resisted, It also reflects the broader problems endemic to the battery industry. China now produces half of the world's batteries and also consumes half of the world's production of cadmium in order to produce nickel cadmium batteries. The

GP poisoning case in 2004 soon alerted other workers in the industry and before long several cases of cadmium poisoning in other battery factories were reported, including the Panasonic case of 2006. It is this reason why the GP case has become typical, and the study of this case tells us a story which is multi-faceted in dimension and rich in social content. We hope that by examining the GP case we can help people understand some of the problems the workers in the industry face and gain momentum to improve this horrible situation. In historical perspective, the struggle reflects the wider struggle of workers against a predatory and rapacious corporation.

The Gold Peak story has still not ended. The wealth of a corporation and the raw power of a one-party state have not stopped the workers from organizing and mounting resistance. They face a long road ahead. There are still more battery workers whose excess exposure to cadmium will develop into cadmium poisoning. They may face an early death from the illnesses which have afflicted them. In Hong Kong, the Gold Peak's lawsuit accusing the three Hong Kong workers' advocate groups of slander is still active. No matter what the outcome, however, we believe that recording this story of blood, sweat, and tears is in itself part of the struggle for justice.

From this story the world will know that even in the face of a huge disparity of power, the workers' revolt against exploitation and injustice continues.

This English edition is abridged from the Chinese edition (yet to be published) which contains a total of 12 chapters. We therefore concentrate on the Power Pack factory workers while leaving out the resistance at the Advance Battery factory. Moreover, the main content of the Chinese edition was finished in early 2007. Whenever possible we have updated the information in this English edition. In general the names of workers are pseudonym.

The work involved in this English edition has far exceeded our initial plan, which is the reason for the delay. We wish to thank the following friends of ours who helped to edit, proof-read or made suggestion to improve the content in various ways: John Chan, Tom Mertes, Rachel Page, Uwe Hoering.

*January 15, 2008*



# Major Players *and* Minor Players

There are many players in our story: some have major parts while others are little more than walk-ons. But when all the parts are put together, they form a complex ongoing narrative, a real-life drama edging slowly and surely towards a tragedy of epic proportions. At the heart of this dark tale is a chemical dust so fine that a human being can breathe it in and not even notice that he or she is doing so. The dust comes from the chemical called cadmium. It is the central figure in our story: without cadmium, there would be no story.

### **An Introduction to Cadmium**

Cadmium (Cd), is a silvery white coloured heavy metal. Resistant to corrosion and abrasion, it is a common carcinogenic chemical with a soft texture that is extremely elastic. It is non-degradable and therefore poses an environmental hazard when discarded as industrial waste. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies cadmium and its compounds as Group<sup>1</sup> of carcinogen for humans.<sup>1</sup> When inhaled, cadmium is eliminated from the human body via urine. However, the amount of cadmium excreted daily in this manner is very small. It represents only about 0.005 – 0.01% of the total body burden which corresponds to a biological half-life for cadmium of about 20-40

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<sup>1</sup> <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Classification/crthgr01.php>. For more information on cadmium, please refer to the documentation on cadmium released by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, USA: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/cadmium/index.html>.

years.<sup>2</sup> Consequently cadmium causes long-term damage to many organs and tissues, especially the kidneys and skeletal structure. In Japan cadmium related diseases were called Itai-itai disease, with 'itai' means 'painful'. The severe bone pains induced by cadmium poisoning caused such distress that victims would cry out "Pain! Pain!"

In July 2006, concerns about the toxicity of cadmium led the European Union (EU) to ban the production of electrical appliances and electrical goods that contain cadmium along with the import of nickel cadmium batteries.<sup>3</sup>

Cadmium oxide, which is red in colour, is chiefly used in the manufacturing of nickel cadmium batteries, whose chief application is making negative electrodes to transmit electric current.

In 2004 China produced half of the world's batteries, 80 percent of which were for export.<sup>4</sup> This was the result of the relocation of the industry - along with many other industries - to China from the rest of the world. In that year China exported 800 million nickel cadmium batteries, a rise of 67 percent over the 1999 level. China has thus also become greatest consumer of cadmium as well: in 2004 China consumed half of the world's cadmium production, 70 to 80 percent of which was destined for nickel cadmium batteries.<sup>5</sup>

The Hong Kong Gold Peak Industries Group also manufactures their batteries in mainland China.

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2 Scientific Report on the Conditions of Work, Cadmium Exposure and Health Problems experienced by Gold Peak's Chinese Workers, April 2007.

3 Nordic Council of Ministers, *Cadmium Review*. [www.who.int/ifcs/documents/forums/forum5/nmr\\_cadmium.pdf](http://www.who.int/ifcs/documents/forums/forum5/nmr_cadmium.pdf) (accessed 29 Jul. 2008).

4 *Zhongguo dianchi gongye jingying quanshu* (China's Battery Industry). (Beijing: Hangkong gongye chubanshe, 2006), p. 284.

5 <http://www.asianmetal.cn/report/2007ge.pdf> (accessed on July 29, 2008).

It is neither expensive nor complicated to ensure that a working environment using cadmium is made safe. The chief requirements are pre-vocational training, efficient ventilation systems and effective face masks, all of which are now legal obligations under China's Production Safety Law and the Law on Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases. Gold Peak ignored these statutes and in fact did not inform workers of the potentially poisonous nature of cadmium, which is also a legal obligation. We believe there is enough evidence to suggest that the company violated regulations in order to keep unit costs down and profits up. Human health was simply not a consideration in its calculations, rendering the three mainland factories and one Hong Kong plant in our story very dangerous places to work indeed. In 2004, more than 400 workers were found to have excessive levels of cadmium in their bodies, and later two were diagnosed with chronic cadmium poisoning. Since then the number of workers found having excessive cadmium levels has decreased, but the number of workers diagnosed with cadmium poisoning rose to 21 by early 2008.

Once information on the appalling health and safety situations in their factories entered the public arena, Gold Peak shifted from denial to blaming their workers:

"It is generally known that smoking cigarettes and eating shellfish, such as oysters, a common food in mainland China, increases cadmium levels in the body."<sup>6</sup> "On your wages?" was the sarcastic response from the astonished women workers most of whom didn't smoke and had rarely tasted oysters!

As we will demonstrate in this book, Gold Peak employees' cadmium-related health problems were not caused by eating oysters or smoking cigarettes. Their condition is a direct result of employment at Gold Peak-owned factories using cadmium oxide in production without proper regard for industrial safety and workers' health.

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6 Gold Peak's response to an enquiry from a Swiss group in February 2006.

While writing this book with the Gold Peak workers, we found ourselves on a learning curve that demanded an understanding of basic technical and descriptive terms. Here are the most commonly used.

### **Urinary Cadmium**

This refers to the concentration of cadmium in urine. Because most cadmium accumulates in the kidneys, measuring the amounts of cadmium in urine is used as a guide to increased exposure.

### **Blood Cadmium**

Measuring cadmium concentration in blood indicates *recent* cadmium contact *only*. It is a useful criteria in determining cases of acute cadmium poisoning. In 2002, the Ministry of Health issued the Diagnostic Criteria for Occupational Cadmium Poisoning (GBZ17-2002). The document states that:

“because there is no established quantifiable relationship between the recent exposure of cadmium and the degree of cadmium concentration in the blood, and there is as yet inadequate information as to the relationship between the level of cadmium in the blood and abnormality of the kidneys, we therefore do not list cadmium in the blood as one of the criteria for the diagnosis of chronic cadmium poisoning. Excessive cadmium in the blood can be evidence of overexposure to cadmium for the diagnosis of acute cadmium poisoning.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Placed under Observation**

The diagnostic criteria state that when two successive cadmium urine tests reveal levels of cadmium above 5 µmol/mol creatinine, the subject must be placed under observation. This level is deemed excessive but not yet a clinical manifestation of chronic cadmium poisoning. Research has shown that when cadmium in urine measures between 5 and 10 µmol/mol creatinine, there is

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7 <http://www.gdpc.com/standard/standard17.htm> (accessed July 25, 2008). In Chinese. Appendix A states: “Cadmium in blood is a good indicator of the most recent measure of cadmium contact.”

a 5-20 per cent chance of kidney dysfunction developing. Being placed under observation requires that the subject must undergo annual tests to ensure that levels do not increase and require reclassification as poisonous.

### **Cadmium Poisoning**

There are two categories of cadmium poisoning: acute and chronic. Both categories have varying degrees of severity. For example, a diagnosis of mild chronic poisoning must be made when:

1. the levels of cadmium in their urine exceed the normal level in two successive urine tests.
2. the patients develop symptoms of poisoning such as dizziness and fainting spells, exhaustion, a loss of the sense of smell and/or aching back and limbs.
3. when laboratory tests demonstrate one of the following biological changes:
  - the concentration of Beta-2 microglobulin in urine is greater than 9.6  $\mu\text{mol/mol}$  creatinine (or ' $\mu\text{mol/mol Cr}$ ' in short form)
  - the concentration of retinal-binding protein in urine is greater than 5.1  $\mu\text{mol/mol}$  creatinine

### **The 'Gold' in Gold Peak**

A second player in our story is the company itself: Gold Peak Industries (Holdings) Limited (hereafter Gold Peak). It is a holding company well known in Hong Kong for its famous brand GP Batteries. Apart from producing disposable batteries, Gold Peak also produces batteries for electrical appliances and electric cars.

The Gold Peak Group was established in 1964, and floated on the Hong Kong stock exchange in 1984. By the 1990s Gold Peak had become an Asian transnational company with extensive industrial investments, mainly in the electrical appliances and electronics industries. During 2002-2003, the group employed over 15,000 people, its annual turnover topped HK\$5.5 billion with total capi-

talization standing at HK\$8.1 billion. The group owns the GP Industrial Limited Company, which again owned two main companies, the Gold Peak Batteries International Limited Corporation, and formerly CIH Limited (which was sold in 2006). These two companies have been independently floated on the Singapore stock market. The Gold Peak Group's overall current production facilities, product research and development and marketing offices are spread over ten countries. It is the tenth largest battery manufacturer in the world and second largest in Asia. Apart from batteries, it also produces electric cable on a global scale.

Gold Peak Group was selected to provide the lighting for the Hong Kong government's millennium ceremony in 2000. In 2003, the GP Batteries was selected by The Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong as one of their top ten brands. Gold Peak has been selected by the Olympic Games 2008 to provide batteries for its 45 seat electric bus.

GP Batteries have long been Gold Peak's 'gold mountain.' For many years the turnover from battery business has accounted for more than half of the group's total turnover. In 2002, GP Batteries outperformed its rivals in both production and sales and boasted profit margins of over 40 percent. In 2004 profit from the battery business accounted for almost 40 percent of the group's gross profit.

Gold Peak is subcontracted by many famous brands: EverReady, Siemens, Sony, Panasonic, Rayovac, Nikon, Canon, Toshiba, Fuji, JVC, Kodak, Konica, Minolta, Olympus, Pentax, Ricoh, etc.

Gold Peak's annual company reports speak of its concern for the general public interest and claim this is clearly demonstrated through its participation in various public and government run projects, for instance the Youth Pre-Employment Training Programme, which resulted in Gold Peak winning the Council of Hong Kong Social Service's 'Caring Company Award' for two consecutive years. The company's apparent green credentials are highlighted via participa-

tion in the Mobile Phone Battery Recovery and Recycling Programme jointly organised by Hong Kong's Environmental Protection Department in conjunction with the industrial sector,<sup>8</sup> and also in an educational project called Green Living Starts With Me jointly run with the Business Environment Council. The fact that disposable batteries are hardly in the spirit of environmental protection appears to have gone over the heads of the company's public relations people and their partners.

When Gold Peak boasts of its concern for employees – as it frequently does in press releases and company reports – our story ventures into the realm of the absurd. For example, chairman Victor Lu Zhongrong (hereon after we will use his Hong Kong name, Victor Lo) stated in the 'Human Resources' section of the 2003-04 GP Annual Report that "people are the Group's greatest asset and the Group is committed to providing an environment across its various divisions where employees feel valued and appreciated, thereby nurturing a sense of belonging to the Group." As we will show in this book, employees have been valued only so far as they have facilitated Gold Peak's striving for increased profits and market share irrespective of their health, welfare or happiness.

Gold Peak's rapid development has gone hand in hand with China's integration into the global market. Three years after the launch of economic reform on the mainland in 1978, Gold Peak subsidiary CIH Limited entered mainland China with a project to supply high quality products such as electrical switch sockets to the Guangzhou China Hotel – now known as the Marriot Hotel. At the time, this was one of the city's key foreign investment ventures and CIH Limited's participation helped it to dominate the high-end electrical goods and services market with a 90 percent market share during the early 1980s. Like many other Hong Kong companies, Gold Peak soon began to shift its production facilities to mainland China in order to take advantage of the investor-friendly environment in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. Independent trade unions were

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8 [http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/waste/prob\\_solutions/wrfp\\_mobile.html](http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/waste/prob_solutions/wrfp_mobile.html) (accessed on July 29, 2008).

– and still are – banned, wages were – and still are – low and any attempts to organise by workers were – and still are – suppressed by the state. In 1986, Gold Peak entered into a joint venture with the Desay Group, which was founded by the Huizhou City Government in 1983 under the name of Huizhou City General Industrial Development Corporation specifically to attract foreign capital. Gold Peak was its first big partner. The local Huizhou government's role was crucial in Desay's development especially at the outset:

When it was working to attract foreign capital, the Corporation enjoyed the wholehearted backing of the local government. This enabled Desay to enter into a partnership with an external company, form a strategic alliance with the relevant players and establish a small number of joint ventures.<sup>9</sup>

In 1996 Desay was listed in the Top 50 Industrial Companies supported by the Guangdong provincial government; in 1999 the Ministry of Foreign Economic Trade selected Desay as one of China's Top 50 Foreign Invested Export Enterprises and it was also one of China's Top 520 Major Enterprises. Another business partner of GP is TCL,<sup>10</sup> which was established in Huizhou in 1981 as a large-scale state owned enterprise making and retailing electronic goods, electrical appliances, information technology and telecommunications products such as mobile phones. It is now a major brand in China. Of note to our story is that TCL's biggest shareholder is the Huizhou city government, which owns more than 40 percent of the company's total stock.<sup>11</sup> GP once owned significant

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9 "In 1992 the Huizhou City People's Government officially formed the Desay Group Corporation on the basis of the official backing of the Huizhou City General Industrial Development Corporation." See the Chronicle of Events on the Desay web site at <http://www.desay.com/docc/about/memorabilia.asp> (accessed on July 29, 2008).

10 TCL stands for The Creative Life, as explained on the company's website: [http://www.tcl.com/main\\_en/](http://www.tcl.com/main_en/) (accessed on July 29, 2008). When it was founded in 1981, TCL stood for Today China Lion.

11 Chinese University of Hong Kong professor Lang Xianping (also known as Lang Hsien-ping), has suggested that there were irregularities concerning the privatisation of state owned shares in TCL. See Lang Xianping, *Wu qu: Zhongguo qi ye zhan lue si wei wu qu fen xi* (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 2006), chapter 7.



shares of TCL and Victor Lo was once appointed member of the board of directors. Like Desay, TCL is also a major battery producer.

Gold Peak has established subsidiaries in most of China's large cities and at least 17 of these are dedicated to battery manufacturing with GP Batteries as the flagship brand. The brand has been among China's top ten best-selling products since 1997. In 2002, Gold Peak bought a 75 percent share in Zhongyin (Ningbo) Batteries, China's second biggest alkaline batteries business, gaining its top brand, Shuanglu, in the process. The acquisition lays the foundation for Gold Peak to become the top player in China's battery production market.

Gold Peak has three battery-producing factories in Huizhou. Huizhou Power Pack Co. Ltd., or Power Pack for short, is known as the 'new factory' and was founded in 1994. In 2006, it employed 1,500 people. Huizhou Advance Battery Technology Co. Ltd., or Advance Battery, was established in 1987, and at one time employed almost 1,300 people. It is known as the 'old factory'. Both are located within the city limits and both produce nickel cadmium batteries. The newest and most modern factory was founded in 2003 and is called the Huizhou Modern Battery Ltd. Whereas the media have carried many stories on the cadmium scandal at Power Pack, there has been relatively little publicity about Advance Battery. The workers' struggle at the former factory was the catalyst to our story and was distinguished by the emergence of a layer of activists and representatives. When the struggle spread to the 'old factory' Advance Battery, a combination of pressure from both the workforce and the local community forced the closure of the factory in 2004.

Former line supervisor Jiang Xiaomei recalls:

*The Advance Battery began making nickel cadmium batteries as soon as it opened. It was known as the Sylva factory for five or six years. At first it was a joint venture with Desay. Then it was renamed Advance Battery. In 1987, the factory was small, consisting of just a few old buildings with tiled roofs. In 1988 a new factory was built.*

*I was attending a nearby middle school at the time. They employed locals and I even used to play inside it. When I graduated from junior middle school in May 1990 I went to work in the factory.*

The third factory involved in this story of cadmium poisoning case was the Shenzhen JetPower Batteries Ltd., or JetPower for short. It was also the subsidiary of the Gold Peak Batteries. Due to various reasons JetPower workers were less militant than those in the other two factories. The Hong Kong Sylva Industries Limited, also subsidiary of Gold Peak Batteries, experienced cadmium poisoning outbreak in September 2004 as well, we do not have space in this book to tell their story.

Victor Lo is currently both Gold Peak's chairman and chief executive. He joined Gold Peak after graduating with a science degree in 1972. Lo is now regarded as something of a public figure in Hong Kong. He is a well-known industrialist and has won the government's Golden Bauhinia medal in recognition of his outstanding success in promoting science and technology. He has also held successive posts as deputy chairman and chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, chairman of Hong Kong Polytechnic University board of directors, and chairman of the Hong Kong Science Park Company. Perhaps unavoidable given his wealth and success, he is also an eminent socialite on the Hong Kong 'scene'. In 2005 he went into politics and was appointed by the chief executive Donald Tsang as an Executive Councillor. Not unrelated to his rise in wealth and renown in Hong Kong's elite circles, Victor Lo has also built up strong relationships with Huizhou government officials and is an honorary citizen of Huizhou city.

Lo's views on labour rights are conservative, especially when it comes to regulating workers' wages. In 2006, when a reporter questioned his views and suggestions on regulating minimum wages and maximum working hours, Lo said, "I believe in the power of the market. Of course the legislature can consider this matter, but the less interference the better."

### **Local government officials**

During the last two decades, the Pearl River Delta area has developed into a huge export processing zone. With its low labour costs and a variety of tax incentives, it has attracted capital from all over the world, with funds from Hong Kong and Taiwan leading the way. Due to its location in Guangdong province, Huizhou greatly benefited from this rapid economic development. The annual value of Huizhou's total output grew from just three billion yuan in 1988 to 80 billion yuan in 2005. Put another way, a small backwater town has transformed itself into a large industrial city in under 20 years. Official websites frequently list its selling points: "one of the world's biggest production bases for batteries; Asia's largest production base for telephones and computer mother boards; more than 40 percent of the world's annual output of CD and DVD laser heads."<sup>12</sup> In terms of economic growth, these figures represent an achievement that the government can with some justification feel proud about. But there has been a price to pay: a dramatic rise in occupational disease and injury that has enveloped the city like a medieval plague.

According to official figures, there are more than 25 million people in more than 500,000 enterprises in mainland China who have come into contact with industrial hazards such as poisonous materials and substances, dust, and noise. The 2004 report of the State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS) stated that:

"China has the world's highest number of people who are in contact with occupational hazards, the highest number of occupational diseases victims and death resulting from such diseases, and the highest number of new cases as well. Approximately 700,000 people suffer from occupational diseases every year. Industrially developed countries have largely resolved traditional occupational hazards like pneumoconiosis, acute and chronic

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12 Liu Li, "The Left Hand Digitizes While the Right Hand Fossilizes: Series on the Construction of Huizhou, Guangdong as a Civilized City, Part 1". *Science and Technology Online*. July 29, 2008. [http://www.stdaily.com/big5/stdaily/2006-11/14/content\\_594465.htm](http://www.stdaily.com/big5/stdaily/2006-11/14/content_594465.htm)

occupational poisoning, and damage from noise in the workplace, but in China they remain a serious threat to workers' safety and health."

Poor labour protection measures have resulted in an ongoing reduction of the time separating workers' contact time with a hazard to their actually becoming ill. And the fatality rate for victims has risen from under 15 percent to more than 20 percent. Occupational hazards are serious because:

"In their rush for instant success and quick profits in recent years, some local governments do not carry out proper evaluations of the implications of FDI-funded projects for occupational health and safety. They are permitting dangerous industries to set up shop and pose serious risks to Chinese employees' physical health. Moreover, environmental pollution from chemicals and radiation are giving a boost to the incidences of illnesses previously classified as rare.<sup>13</sup>"

Lack of relevant legislation is not the cause of this surge in occupational diseases. On the contrary, the legislation is quite advanced and well-defined with relatively high standards for a developing country. For example, mainland diagnosis standards regarding cadmium are higher than those in Hong Kong. The problem lies with law enforcement. Restrictions and administrative constraints on migrant workers' civil liberties are enthusiastically implemented by local governments, while laws and regulations that should protect migrant workers from exploitation are ignored by bosses confident that government officials will not act to implement them.

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13 "Safe production in China: situation remains grim." *Renmin Wang - Guonei Xinwen*, May 28, 2004. Nearly 10 million employees in Guangdong province are engaged in hazardous jobs. The five major industries causing occupational diseases are: processing precious stones (pneumoconiosis), shipping container production (pneumoconiosis from welding), shoe production and leather processing (benzene poisoning causes leukaemia and aplastic anaemia), electroplating, battery production (lead and cadmium poisoning). Other potentially hazardous industries are prominent in Guangdong, such as electronics and printing. Specialist occupational disease inspectors and supervisors are extremely scarce.

Huizhou is typical in this regard. In November 2006, the journal *China Tropical Medicine* published an article written by a researcher from the Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention which criticised the Huizhou City Government's failure to implement the laws concerning occupational health:

“Huizhou has more than 20,000 industrial companies and 1.3 million industrial workers. Among these companies there are at least 4,000 with recognised occupational hazards. However, since 1998 we have only received eight cases of occupational diseases, a figure entirely disproportional to the numbers of factories and workers. There exists a vacuum in the management [of occupational diseases].

Some lower levels of local government administration have been far from neutral in their efforts to attract foreign investment. They allow factories banned by the central or provincial government due to safety and environmental concerns to operate here: factories in sectors such as footwear, gems, batteries, electroplate manufacturing, leather etc. Individual government departments fail to work in accordance with the laws and give operating licences to companies that have been denied permission elsewhere. Companies frequently omit key information when submitting reports to the government. The health department is often unaware of the types of occupational hazards factories pose, and this weakens its ability to prevent occupational diseases as well as monitor occupational health.<sup>14</sup>”

As the GP workers' struggle progressed, a common interest between Gold Peak bosses and local officials was to repress it. The workers faced intransigence from management and government alike--sometimes openly, sometimes from behind the scenes. Their aim was to ensure that the workers' struggle for medical care and compensation was obstructed at every turn. Underlying this bias is a phenomenon called 'local protectionism' which first and foremost refers to the considerable income that the Huizhou government derives from Gold

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14 [http://www.shouxi.net/literature/200611/3117\\_103083.aspx](http://www.shouxi.net/literature/200611/3117_103083.aspx)

Peak's subsidiaries through taxes. Of course, China is certainly not unique in its goal of attracting foreign investment. In China, however, local governments have developed the practice of rewarding civil servants with cash bonuses if they meet investment targets. The Huizhou government has gone so far as to draw up a regulated system of rewards and publishes them on its website. Thus, the income of Huizhou public officials is directly linked to the amount of foreign investment they succeed in attracting to the local economy. The Huizhou Government Information Website has posted a document entitled 'Rules on encouraging foreign businessmen to invest in enterprises in Huizhou' which states:

"In our plan to attract inward investment, work units and individuals making positive and successful contributions will be directly recognised for their advanced work and receive due merit as well as cash rewards. Recorded merits shall become important criteria for promotion of cadres. In attracting inward investment, non-public servants acting as intermediaries in attracting projects involving foreign investment will receive a cash award. Such awards are based on a sliding scale proportional to the value of the investment.<sup>15</sup>"

Linking the amount of foreign investment an official may lure with cash rewards is hardly a policy designed to tackle corruption. For all intents and purposes it represents a green light for officials to collude with investors—a process made easier when the local government directly owns many of the enterprises involved. In addition, it is also common for government officials to personally own shares of these enterprises. Given the absence of democratic control, the policy naturally invites inappropriately close collaboration or even collusion between government officials and private capital at the expense of workers. In this case senior officials often have a default bias towards the interests of private investors over workers. We have already noted the close relationship between

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15 <http://www.huizhou.gov.cn/tzhzviewArticle.shtml?method=viewArticle&id=2AA9A5E8F1404F8ABA172D158346A1D2> (accessed July 25, 2008).

the Huizhou municipal government, Desay and Gold Peak. We will add some remarks on the personal side of this relationship. As a young man, the former Deputy Mayor of Huizhou, Xu Guang, was first a workshop manager at Desay, later promoted to director of Desay, and finally moved into government as Deputy Mayor, serving until 2006. Zhu Youzhi, who sits on TCL's board of directors, had served the Huizhou government for an extended period as a high ranking official. He was later appointed by Victor Lo to sit on the committee of GP Batteries Industrial Safety Trust Fund.

These relationships help to explain why local officials have been so solicitous toward GP. Local officials and GP have been so close that as soon as workers at Power Pack and Advance Battery went on strike to demand health examinations in early 2004, the local city government immediately established a high-level task force made up of officials from various government departments to deal with cadmium-related issues at the factories. They stationed in the two factories and their task was to stop the strike and stabilise labour relations at the factories. Given the vested interests described above, the task force was never going to facilitate equal dialogue between management and workers. On the contrary, the task force acted to head off future protest as well as identify and isolate organisers. In fact, at a certain point the government task force members and Gold Peak management personnel were more or less interchangeable. For example, Zhang Li was a member of the task force but later appointed as a manager at Power Pack in a job that brought her into close contact with workers. She is despised by the workers and has at no point displayed any empathy for their plight. On one unforgettable occasion she was confronted by angry workers who called her a 'devil'. Zhang Li replied that "devils live for a thousand years but good people die young" (that is, doing good to others is no help to one's own self).

It is worth recalling at this point that the workers' demands were far from radical. They had to go to enormous and courageous lengths – negotiating, striking, and blocking highways – simply to win access to hospital checkups in order to

secure official and accurate medical certificates. As the struggle developed, officials from outside of Huizhou city were forced into becoming involved: the Guangdong provincial government, the provincial Women's Federation, the Guangdong Hospital for the Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Diseases (hereafter Guangdong Hospital) and on up to the central government in Beijing. Finally the Ministry of Health in Beijing sent a group of five specialists to Huizhou to try to 'direct' a suitable solution.

### **Women Workers: Shaking up Stereotypes**

In many mainland reports and papers on migrant workers' rights, the subjects – the workers – are reduced to passive objects. They are always portrayed as victims, facing tragedy and in need of our help and charity. Such appeals are a marked improvement on the sometimes mocking press reports of migrant workers threatening to leap from buildings to demand wage arrears that have appeared in the past.<sup>16</sup> But the 'victim'-style reporting is increasingly flawed in its portrayal of migrant workers – particularly women migrant workers – as weak. It is a stereotype that simply doesn't match reality. Every year, migrant workers stage countless strikes and roadblocks, actions that require enormous courage in China's repressive labour relations regime. Moreover, the Gold Peak struggle has seen the emergence of a core of leaders in which women have featured increasingly prominently. Alongside this core have been large numbers of competent worker activists who have learned many lessons during their struggle. These men and women cannot be written off as mere victims. Among them are capable leaders, good public speakers, organisers and motivators and very brave individuals determined to fight for their rights and interests. Even management at times grudgingly acknowledged the developing skills of the workers. In the early days of the dispute, the factory thought it would be easy to fool these women because they were very naive. But a year later, one of the managers admitted: "We used to think you were just a bunch of bumpkins. Now we know

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16 For example, the infamous mixing of English and Chinese phonetics to produce headlines that roughly translate as the 'The Great Leap Show' – *tiao lou xiu* – with the last character *xiu* substituting for the English word 'show'.



you are really smart!”

The two Huizhou factories employed 1,300 and 1,500 workers respectively, who came from different provinces in China. Among them were Hunanese, Sichuanese, and Jiangxi people, as well as locals from Huizhou and other parts of Guangdong province. In many migrants’ struggles, workers are often hampered by hometown or village loyalties sometimes referred to as regionalism. This was not a problem in the Gold Peak struggle. Much more challenging was the familiar problem of persuading workers who believed they had not been directly affected by the cadmium to take part in industrial action.

The workers’ struggle can be divided into two distinct phases. The first and most intense stage was from late 2003 to the end of 2004 when workers in both factories staged eleven strikes, road blocks, and factory gate picket lines, and sent four petitions to the provincial and central government.

The following is a broad chronological sequence of strikes which took place in different departments in the two factories in 2004:

Milling shop workers at Power Pack, early May  
Assembly line at Power Pack, 9-18 June  
Assembly line at Advance Battery, 14-18 June  
Assembly line at Advance Battery, 29 June and 10 July  
Packaging department at Advance Battery, 13-15 August  
Entire factory of Power Pack, 8-11 September

The second stage began when workers were tricked into resigning in late 2004. From then on striking was no longer a viable tactic. Out of work and beginning to disperse, the workers’ struggle shifted focus. Workers went back to the courts to sue for medical care and win just and dignified levels of compensation through legal action. But from time to time they still had to resort to demonstrating in order to get proper medical check-ups or the compensation required

by law. One of the most important and difficult tasks in this second period was to maintain contact as many workers began to head back to their hometowns or look for new jobs, and would only meet once a year when returning to have their cadmium levels checked.

This book chiefly focuses on the first stage of the struggle.

The first worker to emerge as an excellent organiser was a man called **Liu Youping** who worked at Power Pack. One of his fellow workers recalled:

*Liu Youping was one of my best friends who came to the factory in July 2000, one month after I arrived. We were a bit like master and apprentice. The second check-ups [blood tests] were organised in the factory in February 2004, and I immediately told my friend from Hubei [Liu Youping] about the tests as he had already left the factory two or three months earlier. He phoned the factory and they told him he could be included in the check-ups. His test result showed slightly excessive levels of cadmium so the factory then gave him a new job with the factory security team. For Liu it was like starting afresh at the factory on a basic wage of 300 to 400 yuan, but he liked his new job as he only had to put in eight hours a day and had Saturday and Sunday off which gave him plenty of free time. His check-ups in June and July showed no excess cadmium so he left the factory again. I really liked Liu, he's a great guy. When I was in hospital I got really fed up and wanted to leave, and he came to cheer me up.<sup>17</sup>*

The results of independent check-ups made on 17 workers in May 2004 all showed excessive cadmium levels. Liu Youping was a central figure in this group of 17 workers. Among his workmates he had a good reputation for being active, shrewd, and even-handed. In the early days he did much of the organising. He played a full part in the struggle of the women in the assembly department in May and June 2004, and even took the lead. After he left the factory he often visited hospitalised workers and helped workers to begin organising until someone new took over.

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17 Recorded interview with a Power Pack worker.

Women formed the core leadership after Liu left and this fact, along with the durability of the dispute, made the struggle unusual. Most migrant workers' struggles are spontaneous, unorganised, and short-lived, and do not usually have permanent leaders. Nearly all the people who take a lead role in these short struggles are men. But the events at Gold Peak were showing signs of something different: sustainability and organisation. These hopeful signs reflected not only the long term nature of cadmium health problems but also the important role of women line supervisors in the dispute. Many of these workers were relatively well educated, had basic management and leadership experience and enjoyed a level of prestige among the workers. After these supervisors tested positive for abnormal levels of cadmium, they too became targets of management's lies and tricks. They threw their lot in with the workers' struggle, bringing their people and organising skills with them.

**Cheng Xiang** was an assembly line supervisor at Power Pack, and was one of the 17 employees who first went on strike to demand health checks. She was the chief negotiator among the eight representatives elected by the workers to negotiate with the factory. She played a full role in the struggle for compensation, displaying a systematic and determined character. As well as taking part in negotiations with the factory and government task force, she also helped with compensation claims for several workers with excess cadmium levels who had already left the factory. In August 2004, she led the workers' trip to petition the authorities in Beijing. Before leaving the factory in September, she and other workers organised a lawsuit demanding compensation. She was a key player in this action. Her husband has described Cheng as having a strong and rebellious personality. After returning to her home village for a while, she played a leading role in upholding the rights of fellow villagers in various local issues. As the struggle continued, her ability and knowledge of labour law, labour relations and labour rights improved greatly.

**Cao Menghua** is clever, capable, experienced, and tenacious. She has a strong personality and worked as a line supervisor. As the cadmium saga unfolded, she

became increasingly disgusted at the factory's trickery and repression. During the month of September 2004 when the first peak of workers unrest took place she became a workers' representative, and took part in the factory strike, the negotiations, and petition to the Huizhou government. She was hospitalised and used this time to increase her knowledge of occupational illnesses and related labour laws and regulations. She put this self-study to use by continuing the struggle for compensation whenever she had the opportunity to talk with factory representatives.

Feisty, and quick-witted, **Li Dan** worked in the milling shop and was one of the first employees admitted to hospital. Like almost all of the Gold Peak workers, launching a dispute against management was completely new territory for Li Dan and she herself fully acknowledges her and her fellow workers' naivety: *"We had so much to understand. Much of this understanding came after things happened to us."* The unfolding of the cadmium poisoning and Gold Peak's behaviour led Li Dan and her fellow workers into a progressively complicated and contracted struggle with their employers. She was to become one of the organisers and representatives for the second group of Power Pack workers that launched a lawsuit against Gold Peak. In Hong Kong she told Mrs. Li, the deputy general manager from Gold Peak, *"We did not ask for this. It is your tricks and lies that have brought us to this point."*

After getting married and having a baby, **Zheng Chunhong** was employed in the assembly department. Although she did not do well at school and was not good with words, she was regarded by her fellow workers as responsible. She became an organiser and chief representative for the second group lawsuit and was also one of the original 17 workers who went on strike to demand check-ups. Although Chunhong often felt weighed down by what had happened to her health, her innate optimism has helped her through. As Chunhong often told us, "Everyday is a new smile."

**Jiang Xiaomei** started working at the Advance Battery factory after graduating

from junior high school and was promoted to line supervisor in the assembly department. Xiaomei worked at the factory for a long time and was often ill as a result. However, she is an optimist by nature and always had a big smile for everybody. Xiaomei is not especially rebellious by nature and was known for enduring suffering while being reluctant to complain. An uncomplicated woman, she did not draw a dividing line between work and home – also a rural trait – and even took unfinished tasks home with her. Her domestic chores at home and factory workload left her little time to lighten her load by talking with friends and relatives. But her earnest nature and reliable approach to life earned her enormous respect from fellow workers and when she and her fellow workers were forced to leave in early September, she became involved in efforts to get compensation for them and launched a combined lawsuit with workers from Power Pack. Seven representatives were elected for the lawsuit, headed by Jiang Xiaomei.

## Chapter Two

# *December 2003:* **Trouble Brewing**

Power Pack is a large factory well known around Dashuling Village in Xiaojinkou Town<sup>1</sup> near Huizhou North Railway Station. One woman worker at the factory recalled that in its early days Power Pack was a popular employer that would advertise for and hire hundreds of workers at a time. Registration used to take place in the workers' canteen in a lively and cheerful atmosphere. By the late summer of 2004, this once sought-after employer had been forced to hang a permanent banner on the factory wall virtually pleading for workers: 'Gold Peak hires workers every day'.

It had become known among migrant workers as a 'toxic factory'. The irony was that since late 2004, after a year-long workers' struggle, working conditions at Power Pack had improved. However its reputation and notoriety had stuck in the minds of migrant workers. By 2006 the factory could no longer attract enough workers in Dashuling village. Management sent mobile recruiting teams further afield but the factory remained understaffed.

Older than the Power Pack factory, Advance Battery has also been well known in the city of Huizhou. After the cadmium struggles hit the media, Advance Battery stopped all production.

Former workers from these two factories found it hard to find jobs again which were appropriate to their skills and experience. It was because they, too, were

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1 Huizhou originally was a small city. When rapid urbanisation set in 1980's, it expanded its territory to include many villages and towns at the outskirts of the city, without, however, officially changing the rural nature of their local governments.

regarded by bosses as contaminated and like the reputation of their former employers, they have found that the reputation sticks.

### **Deng Xin's discovery**

We must go back to October 2003 to trace the roots of the crisis that descended on these two factories.

“If Li Jizhong had not gone to a Guangzhou Hospital for a check up, everything that came afterwards might never have occurred.”<sup>2</sup>

The media quoted these words from a Power Pack worker. They imply that the cadmium episode at Power Pack came to light quite by chance. But in fact it was a female worker called Deng Xin who was first discovered with excess cadmium levels in her blood samples, not Li Jizhong (Yi Zhixiong). (It may be that the journalists were protecting their sources of information, and made up a false name for Li Jizhong and had not mentioned Deng Xin.) Deng Xin had been suffering from chronic lower back pain, which got worse after she gave birth to twins in September 2002. A hospital doctor diagnosed her problem as a slipped disc. However, Deng Xin was aware that high levels of heavy metal in the body could cause aches and pains, and that her long hours in the workshop exposed her to a heavy metal called cadmium. She was an old hand at Power Pack, working in the milling shop on the first floor, and had been breathing in cadmium oxide powder for 11 hours every day. The milling shop's processing department manufactured electrodes and compressed the raw cadmium oxide powder into a solid form. It was conveyed to the third floor for further processing in the assembly department. So Deng Xin went to the Guangdong Hospital for Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Diseases. Results of her blood tests there showed very high levels of cadmium and the hospital “recommended further testing [for cadmium] or treatment”. She passed the test results to the factory, expecting they would send her for treatment, but she did

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2 ‘Hundreds of workers suspected with excess cadmium levels: cloud of suspicion over Power Pack’ by Tian Yanhong and Zhang Peng in *China Business*, July 18, 2004.

not discuss it with her workmates.<sup>3</sup> Two months later the factory heads still hadn't responded to her request.

She spoke of her worries to her fellow workers, including Yi Zhixiong, who also worked in the milling shop. Like Deng Xin, Yi had been having dizzy spells – an ailment common among workers affected by cadmium. He then went to the Guangdong Hospital for tests, which showed that the level of cadmium in his blood was even higher than Deng Xin's, reaching 187 nanomoles per litre (nmol/L) when the normal level is 4.5 ~ 44.5 nmol/L. Workers concluded that Deng's levels were lower because Yi Zhixiong had worked in the milling shop for longer.

As soon as the news got out, panic spread though the milling shop. Although nobody had a clear idea of what excess cadmium levels meant in practice, the workers correctly assumed that the news was definitely bad and had implications for their health and wellbeing. One worker from the milling shop recalled the scene:

*The moment they heard Yi Zhixiong had such high levels of cadmium, people began to cry. I saw tears streaming down Huang's face. Yi Zhixiong was a machine operator, and once the machine was working normally, he would move away from it. So if his levels were high, there was no hope for workers actually mixing the cadmium powder and making electroplates. They had to be at their work stations all day long.*

Later, many workers mentioned that as early as June 2003, medical checks of workers with dizziness and headaches had revealed excess cadmium levels. Yao, whose daughter was born in March 2001, was one of the first hospitalised workers. During her pregnancy, a blood test showed excess levels of cadmium. A doctor at the Central Hospital found out her blood test showed abnormality and asked if her work involved contact with any chemicals, and advised her that

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3 Deng Xing's account was broadcast in 'Excessive cadmium levels in Huizhou' by Chongqing TV on October 25, 2004 --- months after the event.



### **Battery Manufacturing Procedure**

**Milling Shop:** pour cadmium powder into metal grid; cast into rough metal blocks with particular shapes with rolling mill; cut rough-products into electrode plates with machine tools. The positive and negative electrode plates are made in this procedure.

**Assembly Shop:** assemble the electrode plates and other materials to make the batteries.

**Weigh Plates:** weigh electrode plates one by one; group plates of equal weight according to their electrical polarity.

**Cut Plates:** re-cut plates which do not meet weight specifications to insure that they measure up to the standard.

**Solder plates:** solder nickel plates onto the positive electrode plates, which will then be joined with the top of the battery valve.

**Package plates:** pack the positive electrode plates soldered with nickel plates in insulated paper to prevent contact between the positive and negative electrode plates.

**Roll up:** roll each positive electrode plate with a negative electrode plate and a piece of insulated paper into a battery valve.

Shape the valve: shape the battery valve into specific forms with a lathe.

**Composing Shop:** attach batteries together into larger packs which will provide stronger electrical current for large electrical appliances.

**Packaging Shop:** pack the products for shipment.

instead of going back to work, she should go to Guangzhou for a check up at the Guangdong Hospital. But as Yao's pregnancy seemed normal, she decided that there was nothing for her to worry about.

Media reports on occupational disease have increased in mainland China in recent years. But the term of occupational disease is still mistaken by most workers as unusual habits as a result of doing particular types of jobs over a long period. The misunderstanding of workers is chiefly a result of the failure of government authorities in promoting awareness on the issue. The Chinese government introduced two new laws pertaining to safety at work in the early years of this century --- ten years after the flourishing of export processing zones and the huge waves of migration from the rural areas. Law on Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Disease became effective in May 2002 and the Safe Production Law became effective in November 2002. Local governments are obliged to draw up implementation regulations, usually at provincial level, to render national laws appropriate to specific conditions in their respective provinces. China's State Administration for Work Safety was created in February 2001, but this body has generally failed to promote the new laws via accessible channels such as the television, free publications or newspapers. This is standard practice for Hong Kong's Occupational Safety and Health Council.

Workers at Gold Peak's factories on the mainland would therefore have very few, if any, opportunities to understand the risks from the chemicals they had to handle at work. Aches, pains, dizziness and nausea were attributed to long hours and a continual intensification of work in general. Many workers resign from dirty jobs they can no longer tolerate without even realising they have contracted occupational diseases as was the case with GP workers.

Milling shop workers however did realise that the intensely dusty atmosphere would harm their lungs and many ate pigs blood in the mistaken belief that this would help to expel the dust. The new law on occupational disease made it legally incumbent on employers to inform workers of the hazards and potential

hazards they faced at work. Gold Peak did not meet these legal obligations.

### **Battery production at Gold Peak violates the law**

Gold Peak owns at least four factories where cases of excess cadmium levels or cadmium poisoning have occurred: Power Pack, Advance Battery, JetPower in Shenzhen, and Sylva Industries Ltd. in Hong Kong. Gold Peak employees in Hong Kong told us that senior managers sent from the Hong Kong factory to the mainland were well aware that cadmium was poisonous and that employees required information about it and protection against it.

Gold Peak's occupational health and safety regime did not consider, or disregarded, the law to a considerable degree. The mainland's Law on Safe Production and Law on Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases make it quite clear that the employer is responsible for informing workers of all hazardous aspects of work with particular emphasis placed on harmful chemicals. The employer is also responsible for providing adequate labour protection, for seeing that the workplace conforms to explicit standards of health, and for ensuring that pregnant women are not assigned to hazardous duties. Both Power Pack and Advance Battery ignored these legal obligations.<sup>4</sup>

Power Pack further flouted article 13 of the Law on Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases, which rules that the factory should separate hazardous and non-hazardous tasks, and provide changing rooms, bathrooms for workers, and rest rooms for pregnant women. Many workshops had no ventilation, so when workers cleaned the work station it raised clouds of cadmium dust so thick that they could barely see fellow workers in the same shop. Old hands had been working in this environment for 12 hours a day for years, "just like robots, clocking on and off".

Workers' water cups were kept in the open in a corner of the workshop that

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4 For further details refer to the online article 'Violating labour law regulations at Power Pack and Advance Battery' at <http://globalmon.org.hk>

was thick with cadmium dust, which quickly settled on any clean ones. Most of the cups did not have lids. When water was provided, it was so hot that even those that did have lids had to be removed to allow the water to cool. Factory rules prohibited workers from visiting other work stations, and those on night shift were not permitted on other floors, which forced them and the line supervisors to eat in the workshop. This was the situation for ten years until drastic improvements were made in late 2004 following the bad publicity. Until that time, knowledge of the dangers of cadmium was unknown to assembly line supervisors and workers did not know how much cadmium they had ingested in that time.

A Power Pack woman worker's recollections:

*The factory working environment was disgusting. The first three floors of the workshop had no air extraction facilities and hence no ventilation whatsoever. From the fourth floor upwards there was only rather ineffective extractor fans located high above both the workers and the dust itself, so it was almost impossible to extract the harmful elements in the air. To make matters worse, the factory buildings were very close to the dormitories, and the extractors' exhaust dust was directed towards the dormitory doors and windows. So even if the extractor fans were doing their job, they were simply redirecting hazardous materials towards our living quarters!*

*Protective equipment in the factory was absolutely useless. First of all the face masks: From founding the factory in 1994 until just before the outbreak of SARS<sup>5</sup> in 2003, everybody in the assembly department (including workers doing the initial processing on the first floor, who had direct contact with nickel and cadmium) used paper face masks that were so thin they couldn't even keep out a cold – they were thinner than a sanitary towel! They used this type of face mask for six years, and even these were unavailable for some workers. In 2003, in order to prevent the spread of SARS, the factory began issuing disposable blue surgical face masks three times per*

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5 SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, first outbreak in Mainland China in 2003 and soon spread to Hong Kong.

*week. Because excess cadmium levels were discovered in many workers that year, the factory first issued two and later three dust-proof face masks per week in response to workers' reactions. Gloves and work clothes were not made of dust proof materials, and because the factory workshop had no changing room, workers had to eat the evening meals wearing work clothes and wash them at home or in the dormitory. Thus hazardous nickel and cadmium dust was transported to where workers lived and ate.*

*In the first five months of pregnancy, women workers continued to work in the milling shop before being sent to the second floor. Nursing mothers had to breastfeed their babies during their work<sup>6</sup> so they were unable to change their dusty work clothes before the breastfeeding. Those babies may well have been exposed to cadmium dust.*

Paper masks are absolutely unacceptable as far as effective protection from cadmium oxide dust is concerned. According to the Cadmium Handbook published by the US's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, when cadmium in air is less than 10 times the permitted level, the employers need to provide "a half mask, air purifying equipped with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter." When cadmium in air is 25 times of the permitted level, "a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR) with a loose-fitting hood or helmet equipped with a HEPA filter." In addition employers are required to provide "a written respiratory protection program administered by a trained administrator."<sup>7</sup> In Power Pack the cadmium in air was 10 times the permitted level, while Advance Battery was 35 times (see Chapter three), and yet the management only provided paper masks!

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6 Working mothers in GP factories had to breast feed their babies, brought to factories gates by their family members, during working hours. The factories had no nursery room for them.

7 <http://www.osha.gov>

**‘China’s top level management knew that cadmium was poisonous’, an Advance Battery worker recalls,**

*Xue Peiqiong was in charge of the workshop in April 2002. She wore five face masks when inside the workshop! One year later she was hospitalised for jaundice and hepatitis and then left, saying the place was poisonous.*

*Liu Xinhua was production chief of Advance Battery from 1990, leaving after seven or eight years for the new Power Pack. Once he scared me by saying that females shouldn’t work here for long otherwise it would prevent them from having children. Then someone had a baby and I forgot about it.*

Middle and lower management were not so lucky. They were vaguely aware of the toxicity of cadmium, but line supervisors knew nothing about it. So when their health checks showed excess cadmium levels, their anger was perfectly justifiable.

A reporter from China Central Television’s *Today’s Viewpoint* visited both Huizhou factories in August 2004 to photograph the renovated workshop and interview the boss who said that Power Pack became “aware that cadmium is dangerous only until recently, but those affected have now been well cared for.” The manager went on to emphasise that, “Those workers suffering consequences today bear a part of the responsibility because the company covered this aspect of training and the workers themselves ignored hygiene and protection, which is what led to the excess cadmium levels in their bodies.”

The sympathetic reporter commented, “We saw the training material in Power Pack, which exclusively addressed how to avoid polluting the environment, but there was nothing about how to protect the workers, and the material was produced in 2001. No training was arranged prior to this.”

When the reporter asked why the workers had not been tested for excess cadmium levels in the seven or eight years before 2001, Power Pack chief replied,

“Previous checkups concentrated on infectious and contagious diseases and hepatitis, not on excess cadmium levels. Besides the Huizhou Disease Control Centre which was capable of monitoring occupational diseases was founded in 2002, and for this historical reason, Power Pack could not apply the Law on Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases to workers undergoing periodic health checks for occupational diseases.”

A guest on the programme, a deputy professor in the law faculty at the Renmin University of China Li Jianfei, refuted the factory’s excuse that in the past they were not aware of the danger of cadmium, saying, “China has legislated on poisonous and hazardous production since the People’s Republic of China’s establishment, and included cadmium in 1981 in the Chemical Industry Department’s List of Seriously Poisonous and Hazardous Production in the Chemical Industry. Most non-specialists are unfamiliar with cadmium poisoning, but it is not a recent problem to specialist factories. In light of this, it implies a deliberate violation by the factory.” Li also noted that in law the factory must bear total responsibility for compensation, and is liable to punishment by the relevant government department. As to the company’s claim that prior to 2002 there had been no Huizhou hospital available for cadmium test, it must be refuted by the fact that the Guangdong Hospital was capable of conducting tests.

In addition to all the cadmium dust blowing around the workshop, workers had to use thinner to wipe batteries clean when sealing with bitumen. Other chemicals used were nickel, printing ink, cleaning chemicals, and solvents. All these other materials are toxic, especially the thinner that contains benzene, a virulent poison, which was used in large quantities.

### **Jiang Xiaomei recalls the work environment in Advance Battery**

*I began as a production line supervisor in May 1991, and later transferred to assembly line supervisor. All in all, I managed four lines. One small and four big dust extractors were placed at certain locations in the workshop, including one at*

*the entrance and another at the exit. The noise level was so loud that workers near the big extractors had to wear earplugs. Everybody had a broom for sweeping up at the end of a shift, and there was lots of dust. A large ceiling fan in the workshop blew the dust everywhere. There were also vacuum cleaners. The dust extractor vibrated, and we could see the vibration was even worse after any dust was sucked in. It could catch fire when positively and negatively charged dust particles that it sucked in collided. This caused a fire at Gold Peak's factory in Canada and was precisely why top level managers transferred order lists from Canada to mainland China. The dust extractors consumed a lot of electricity, and were finally dismantled.*

*Thinner was used to clean off the bitumen that oozes around as we sealed the batteries. We needed more than 20 cans a month. We tried many other cleaners, but none worked as well as thinner. Each week we had a minor clean up, and a major one every month that took several hours. The monthly cleaning used up kilos of cloth to remove the dirt with the thinner and people often fainted. They were then sent to hospital but had to pay for the treatment themselves. Whenever the bosses came to the workshops, they could not stand the smell of thinner. Later the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Health and internal checks by the factory all showed excess levels of cadmium.*

*In 1996, the factory began arranging two health examinations each year, mainly checking for emphysema<sup>8</sup> and hepatitis B.<sup>9</sup> In 1997, the milling shop was moved from Hong Kong to Power Pack, and then Advance Battery set up its own milling*

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8 Later, Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd argued that the results of two tests per year showed no excessive levels of cadmium. But those checkups did not test for cadmium levels, so naturally none was revealed.

9 In China there are reportedly 120 million hepatitis B carriers. Whether the carrier has caught hepatitis B or not depends on testing to gauge the extent of liver failure. Discrimination against hepatitis B carriers is serious in mainland China. In March 2004, the Fuyang Knitting Mill in Dongguan city dismissed hundreds of workers with the excuse that they were carriers. The factory revoked their labour contracts and refused to pay them compensation. However, terrible working conditions were the very cause of hepatitis infection among those workers. The media reported that overtime amounted to 180 hours per month in the knitting mill. (See 'Hundreds of workers fired, are they incompetent? Or are they HBV carriers?' in Beijing Youth, May 1, 2004).



*shop in 1998. (There was no medical check on cadmium level in the workers' bodies prior to 2004)*

*After the Environmental Protection Group was established (in the plant) in 1998, its training material declared that the dust was toxic and workers should drink plenty of water. The training in fact consisted of assembly line supervisors reading part of the material to workers, who were then forced to wear face masks, although line supervisors were not. None of us thought much about the poison, as we had no idea as to what kind of toxicity they were talking about. The first face masks issued were made of paper and were not changed daily due to factory policy on minimising waste.*

*Drinking plenty of water would probably have been good for us. As the case developed, Ms Liu, a stylish dresser in the workshop and born in Huizhou was commended in particular because she claimed to drink lots of water every day, and therefore had no excess levels. As well as drinking plenty of water, she also regularly washed her face. But for us, working flat out in the factory, there was not even time for drinking enough water.*

### **Commotion in the milling shop (December 2003 –April 2004)**

As workers developed aches and pains, only a few suspected that their daily 'nausea, headaches, aching bones, and frequent miscarriages' resulted from cadmium accumulating in the body. At first only a few workers were affected. The hands and feet of one quite young woman worker were in a terrible state, and at times the itching was so intense that she scratched the skin off them. In less than one year's service some workers who had quite limited contact with cadmium had much worse excess cadmium or cadmium poisoning than others with 10 years' service. Without concrete accessible information on cadmium and how it affects different people in different ways, it was not easy to blame something that the workers knew nothing about.

Then workers began looking for information about cadmium on the internet, while others bought books about it, photocopying sections to circulate among

the workforce. But there were never enough exchanges, leading to conjecture and guesswork. At first misunderstandings and rumours abounded. At Advance Battery there was even gossip about two workers in Power Pack dying of cadmium poisoning. A worker told us about some of the stories doing the rounds at the time. One of the workers recalled:

*Morale at work changed greatly. In the early days nobody understood anything properly and many of us thought that there was no difference between excess cadmium levels and poisoning. After Yi Zhixiong picked up his test results, some workers said he had an occupational disease. Some workers regarded Yi's positive test result of cadmium excessive level as good news for him, or even as good as getting an iron rice bowl, since under the laws the company had to look after him. Later developments proved them wrong, of course.*

*Another story doing the rounds was that most women who handled cadmium and who fell pregnant had baby girls, except for one woman, Mrs Huang. Mrs Huang's job was transporting materials, which only brought her into contact with glue. The dust had not harmed another woman who married and had a baby boy, but she was new to the factory. So we were all afraid. Bearing boys was important to people from the countryside. While in hospital a man who was set on having a baby boy told us that he just wanted to get rid of the cadmium, and feared his wife could not have boys. Compared to having a son, the would-be compensation money meant nothing to him. Many men ended their relationship with girlfriends when they found out the latter had excess cadmium levels. Once hospitalised, the workers calmed down somewhat, after one assembly line supervisor with excess levels gave birth to a boy.<sup>10</sup>*

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10 There may be a scientific basis for workers who repeated hearsay like this. High levels of cadmium in men's bodies affects sperm formation and level of activity causing a decrease in the content of Y chromosomes, thus vastly affecting the possibility of having boys, whereas the effect of cadmium on X chromosomes in sperm is smaller. Thus the chance of bearing baby girls is quite high. A case is known as 'daughter village' in north Wales in the UK. A biologist's on the spot investigation confirmed that all babies born within several years were girls, because the cadmium discharged from a nearby zinc mine had polluted the water source. The same cause produced 'daughter villages' in China, for example Gaoban village in Qingliu county, Fujian province.

Dozens of women workers resigned as soon as their tests results showed an excessive cadmium level because they worried that their husbands and boyfriends would desert them if they found out. Some even gave up their right to follow up checks.

To return to Yi Zhixiong's case, after he himself paid for a cadmium blood test that showed excess levels, nine mostly women workers in the milling shop decided to pay for their own tests at the Guangdong Hospital. The nine involved were workers on double shifts (day and night shifts) in the factory and this delayed their being able to get tested. On December 22, they finally arrived at the Guangdong Hospital.

When they reached the second floor of the hospital, Chen Chaodong the outpatient department head came across them by chance. They told him they worked in a battery factory and wanted physical examinations. Chen invited them into his consulting room, and asked for details. He explained that unfortunately the hospital's machine was out of order and he could only test their blood for cadmium when replacement parts arrived from the US. They looked at each other in disappointment barely able to believe it.

*At shift change time that night, as they went into the workshop, one of their fellow workers asked with a smirk, 'So the machine at the hospital is broken isn't it?'*

*They were shocked, 'How do you know?'*

*Their fellow workers laughed.*

*'Aha. When so many of you asked for leave at the same time, the factory was bound to know what you were up to. They contacted the Health and Epidemic Prevention Station and the latter's vehicles rolled up to the factory (to talk with the boss). The boss had already phoned up (the Station) even before your train left.'*

Several of these nine women later became the most active and determined worker representatives, collecting and spreading information, negotiating with the factory, and going to court. When they recalled the story of how management manipulated things behind their backs they were both annoyed and amused at the same time: "they had made a laughing stock out of us!"<sup>11</sup>

### **Fighting for the Truth**

Panic spread quickly among workers now because many of them were displaying symptoms. Their fear continued to spread and intensify as the situation developed. Efforts by management to repress or spread disinformation about the dangers of cadmium and the validity of test results failed to calm the atmosphere.

Milling shop workers collectively demanded that the factory send them to hospital for checkups. But the demand was ignored. Yi Zhixiong and another worker who had also paid for his own test were targeted as nuisances by management who began deliberately creating difficulties for them. They were threatened with dismissal for continually demanding to be hospitalised for tests instead of returning to their posts. The factory issued a notice that said "Because cadmium levels in [Yi Zhixiong and the other worker] are slightly excessive, they have stirred up trouble in the factory. Dismissal will follow unless they return to work within 14 days". The workers went to the personnel office, and tore down the notice saying:

*You want to fire us? OK! But only after you have removed the cadmium from our bodies!*

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11 These Power Pack workers did not believe that the machine had really broken down. Eight days after a go-slow began at the factory, the hospital sent urine samples for testing, and the results were ready within days. It is too much of a coincidence that before the go-slow, the machine was out of order, but once the workers went on the go-slow, the machine was suddenly fixed.

The factory's arbitrary attitude did nothing to stop a general go-slow, and production in the milling shop fell dramatically. Those who were still working in there were full of resentment and simply slowed down. Everybody looked worried hardly anybody spoke for a whole day, putting management in a very tight spot.

Production managers visited the milling shop to encourage the workers and raise morale. But the workers cut them short, asking,

*We all are dying! What's the point of raising our morale?*

Because the milling shop wasn't working properly, production stopped in the assembly department and other workshops. To boost morale among the workers, one afternoon the city government sent the aforementioned Doctor Chen Chaodong, to discuss cadmium tests with them. He told them that simply drinking plenty of water and urinating often would discharge any cadmium from their bodies.<sup>12</sup> The workers didn't know whether to believe him or not although it was clear to them that their go-slow had rattled management.

On December 30, 2003<sup>13</sup> the Huizhou Disease Control Centre and the Guangdong Hospital jointly arranged for the doctor to visit all the workers in the milling shop and engineering department, and all assembly line supervisors with more than 10 years' service. Blood samples from this total of 79 people were sent to Guangzhou for testing. Later the workers said that the factory's reason for checking milling shop workers was firstly because they had made the biggest fuss, and second because they had most contact with cadmium oxide and were most at threat.

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12 'Hundreds of workers with suspected excess cadmium levels: Cloud of Suspicion over Power Pack' by Tian Yanhong and Zhang Peng in *China Business*, July 18, 2004.

13 On May 15, 2004 Power Pack released the 'Report on Excessive Cadmium in Blood' that refers to December 31 as the date of the testing.

On January 2, 2004, the factory announced that the test results proved that 18 workers had excessive cadmium levels in their blood. On the advice of the hospital the factory hospitalised four workers for cadmium expulsion trials.“” These four workers had worked for Power Pack for more than five years, which had resulted in very high cadmium levels.

The company squandered the initial few months and the outcome was a farce. The half-life of cadmium in the human body is several decades, yet in a couple of weeks, the factory declared that the excess cadmium in these four workers ‘had been appropriately expelled’. But there was evidence that led workers to suspect that the hospital was not telling the truth. When the factory received the test results, it did not pass them on to the workers, instead concocting a table listing the ‘test results’, but many workers in the milling shop thought the factory had falsified the results. Workers insisted that if the factory had not forged the results, it would be willing to show them the original results from the hospital. The factory’s table revealed that only a few workers had excessive levels of cadmium in blood, yet later tests disclosed that all the old hands had high cadmium levels in their blood, and a line supervisor was diagnosed with cadmium poisoning. Some workers who saw through the suspicious test results went to the Guangdong Hospital and paid for checkups themselves. After workers reported the hospital to the authorities, it no longer dared to create difficulties for their private check up. Victims found that tests conducted within days of each other varied considerably. For example, the result of a test on May 13, 2004 gave Li Yamei’s level of cadmium in blood as 1.9 mg/L, however results from tests on May 17 and 25 revealed the levels were 8.07 mg/L and 8.7mg/L, more than four times higher than the first test. This led to a further loss of faith in both the factory and the hospital. (For more see Chapter Three)

The company’s ploy to fool the workers was a miserable failure. With the benefit of hindsight we can see that Power Pack managers’ incompetence prompted local officials to intervene and ensure that the problem did not get out of hand.

It was reported in Hong Kong that they told Victor Lo the reason for his failure was that "when you should handle minor affairs as if they are major ones, and you handle major affairs like minor ones."<sup>14</sup> The company was not aware that the workers now had accumulated more knowledge about the hazards that cadmium posed and the laws regulating such risks. The company was taken by surprise when the issue was reported in the media and their lack of policy began to shift from a hard line to a slightly conciliatory approach. At first, they attempted to win the day by simple deception, hiding away the original test results from the workers and substituted them with suspicious copies. But they were completely unprepared for the workers response and had to send them hastily for repeat checkups and show the real test results, or even hospitalise them.

The factory also won the hospital's support for its attempt in hiding the truth. Hospital head Chen Jiabin, told the workers that he could remove the cadmium poison from their bodies in one week.

This happened just as many workers' employment contracts needed renewing. Up to this time, the contract period had been one year, but this time the factory added new regulations for contracts: women's would still last for 12 months, but the men's could only be for six months' duration, a move which was to affect later developments quite profoundly. The change was management's attempt to limit the male militancy, but instead it unleashed dissatisfaction and resistance among the workforce.

Milling shop workers gave second blood samples on February 24, including those who had already tested positive for excess levels of cadmium and those who had not been tested before for other reasons. The results showed that all old hands had excess cadmium levels, five of whom were hospitalised. One worker told us:

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14 'Gold Peak: handles minor affairs like major ones', *Hong Kong Economic Daily*, September 22, 2004, by Lan Wanjun and Wu Guohui.

*Zeng and Yao were sent to hospital in part because they were so compliant. After Yao returned, Old Cai [assembly department chief Cai Chunqiao] went round making announcements and telling workers in meetings that she was cured, and back to normal, and that the other assembly line supervisors were fine, and that if they didn't believe that Yao was OK, they could just go and ask her. I asked her if it was true that she was healed. Yao replied that she didn't know whether she was OK or not, but that they said she was.*

Reluctantly the workers went back to work, again demanding to be hospitalised for treatment. The factory's 'improved offer' was for workers with excess cadmium levels to transfer to the assembly department on the fourth floor where they packed batteries, and for these workers to work only eight hours per day. The factory's last 'improvement' was not intentionally easing their workloads, but in fact a disguised 'punishment' reserved for 'troublemakers'. Power Pack's wages ranked among the highest in Huizhou, two thirds of which was earned through working overtime, so when there was no overtime, the workers' monthly income was down to only 400 or 500 yuan per month, with 160 yuan deducted for bed and board.

Li Tong recalled:

*When Old Cai asked me to work eight hours a day, this was a disguised punishment. I told him: 'Mr. Cai, we workers came here to make enough money to support our families and I need to work 12 hours a day to do that. Without overtime, I would earn less than 17 yuan a day, so when my board is deducted, I can't save a cent. What am I supposed to do about my family? This is why I refuse to work eight hours a day. If the factory doesn't care about us, we may as well rot in the workshop and you will have to deal with the consequences.'*

Although it took blood and urine samples from the workers, the local hospital tacitly backed the factory by refusing to pass blood test results directly to the workers, handing them instead to the factory. When workers with excessive



cadmium level in blood demanded for treatment, the doctors then refused them on the ground that cadmium in blood level was not grounds for diagnosing cadmium poisoning, and only cadmium in urine was the chief criteria. Then, the workers, with or without excessive cadmium in blood, demanded urine tests. The factories and the hospital eventually only allowed those workers with excessive cadmium in blood to have urine tests. In practice they made excessive cadmium in blood a precondition for urine tests, which entirely violated the proper procedure as stipulated by the laws. By arbitrarily introducing their own rules, the hospital had filtered out as many workers as possible from getting proper medical check up and treatment. In Power Pack the malpractice continued until end of May 2004, and in Advance Battery it continued right up to July. Since then whenever the hospital arranged testing they directly arranged workers to take urine tests, without making excessive cadmium in blood as a condition for the tests. However, they never bothered to explain why they invented their own rules in the first place.

## Chapter Three

# Strike!

Beginning in February 2004, milling shop workers in Power Pack mounted a go slow in order to persuade management to respond to their demand for further medical checks. The workers had been angered by management's refusal to hand over test results directly to workers. Instead of allowing workers to see the original paperwork, management had drawn up a table of results that workers suspected hid as much information as they revealed. A small number of employees were receiving treatment in hospital but this was clearly little more than an attempt to pacify the increasingly frustrated mood among the workforce. The atmosphere worsened when some of those in hospital were discharged with hospital-issued certificates claiming that their health had returned to normal. Yao was discharged on March 23, 2004 with a certificate claiming that 'after cadmium expulsion treatment, the cadmium in the urine is now normal', and that she had 'recovered'. Thus she no longer qualified for a follow up medical check of her cadmium level. Yao was sceptical as a previous test had shown an excess of 2 times the normal level of cadmium, and it is impossible for a normal human being to expel this level of cadmium from the body within weeks. She showed her medical report, which she paid for herself, to the management but got no attention. She also paid for a check-up for her daughter at the Guangdong Hospital, which showed her urinary cadmium had reached  $8.2 \mu\text{mol/mol Cr}$ , which when calculated by adult standards is an excess of 1.84 times. The management simply ignored Yao's request that the company should do something for her daughter.

Some of the workers who had undergone cadmium expulsion treatment had suffered bad side effects. Doctors had injected chelating agent EDTA into some workers as part of a trial treatment program which caused their facial skin to

peel off and, in some cases, damage to their kidneys. The trial treatment was halted and the doctors were forced to admit that there was no known medication capable of expelling cadmium from the body without serious side effects and that they could do little more than moderate some of the symptoms such as headaches. (It should not be news to these doctors. According to the Diagnostic Criteria of Occupational Cadmium Poisoning – GBZ17-2002 expelling cadmium by injecting chelating agents is dangerous and un-effective. It was strange that the Guangdong Hospital made these attempts in the first place.) Authorities at the hospital were worried at the workers potential reaction, especially as they had initially come to the aid of Gold Peak by reassuring workers that cadmium could be discharged in a matter of weeks.

### **Phase One: The Right to Treatment**

May 2004

By April 30, 2004 nine workers had been discharged from hospital.<sup>1</sup> Some of the workers had made good use of their time in hospital by studying the relevant laws and regulations concerning occupational illness. For some of them, it was the first time they had ever come across the term. They also maintained regular contact – via mobile phone – with workers at the factory and this had proved important during the strike by 17 workers with excess levels of cadmium. As one worker explained

*During my time in hospital I came to understand that anyone classified with an industrial injury was legally entitled to receive average wages, free meals and accommodation. They were better off than those still going to work.*

But, contrary to the accusations of some Gold Peak managers, workers' mental-

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1 This batch of workers included Yao.

ity is not 'insatiably avaricious'.<sup>2</sup> It was not even certain that the affected workers would be able to apply for an occupational disease diagnosis or receive industrial injury treatment. One hospitalised woman worker said that she did not mind if she did not enjoy the benefits which industrial injury victims were entitled to, and that 700 or 800 yuan a month for her would have been reasonable. After treatment and discharge from hospital she hoped to be able to go back to work, and would be satisfied with being transferred to a different workshop at the factory. Nobody considered making a big commotion about it, they just demanded check-ups, treatment, and some living expenses when hospitalised. On pay day these workers took home less than 200 yuan after deductions for dormitory accommodation. The issue here is surely management's miserly treatment rather than the workers' avarice.<sup>3</sup>

One line supervisor in the milling shop, Cao Menghua, explained the situation of those in hospital.

*I drew the wages of those four in hospital from the accountancy department, and they were little more than 100 yuan! I was furious and told the factory they were supposed to be paid an average of 12 months wages, so why did they just get this pittance? The families can't manage on 100 yuan. The factory still saw fit to deduct 45 yuan for board, and then another five yuan a day for nursing care. This was when I started feeling angry with the factory.*

The workers in hospital were even angrier, and rang the factory. Liu Xinhua, the production manager, took the call, saying, 'It is all in accordance with labour law and factory rules, which the factory always follows ...'

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2 Workers in the Hong Kong subsidiary of the Gold Peak Batteries told us that they heard their middle and senior managers saying that that the Power Pack workers received tens and hundreds of thousands of yuan of compensation, and that these workers were insatiably avaricious blackmailers.

3 Although they had not been officially diagnosed as occupational disease patients, they could be listed as 'suspected occupational diseases victims.' According to Chinese law, the latter category is entitled to get paid an average of the previous 12 months pay when hospitalised.

The factory then arranged for them to be discharged from hospital on April 30 and then put them back to work. The three workers refused.

*After Huang Zhixiang, Huang Youbin, and Wei Fang returned to the factory, on the suggestion of the Guangdong Hospital the factory reallocated their jobs from the electrode plate manufacturing to the Combination Shop, but all three refused to be reassigned, and even refused to attend work. This is exactly what happened.”<sup>4</sup>*

The three went to the personnel office demanding that they receive benefits for being suspected industrial injury victims. Chen Jianfen, the Personnel Manager, responded that she wanted to see where the law stated they were entitled to such benefits. The three workers showed him the relevant legal articles.

Chen: “What are these booklets? We never came across these.”

Workers: “You don’t give us what we want, you bear the consequences!”

Ending the argument, Chen Jianfen simply said that the company would take responsibility and then refused to talk again. She also refused to meet the workers again.

### **Assembly Shop: An Undercurrent of Anger Erupts**

March to May 2004

Located on the third floor, the assembly shop was Power Pack’s biggest department, with more than 500 mainly women workers. There were quite a lot of pregnancies there. The work involved processing the electrode plates from the milling shop to produce complete nickel cadmium batteries. Workers were in contact with cadmium oxide, and the work of weighing the plates and wrapping

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4 Huizhou Power Pack ‘Report on Excessive Levels of Cadmium in Blood’, May 15, 2004.

them up was particularly dusty.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the panic, many workers were indeed suffering from physical discomfort, fainting, headaches, and listlessness and increasing numbers of them suspected they had cadmium poisoning. A steady flow of assembly department workers, of their own accord, went to the Guangdong Hospital for tests as the milling shop workers had done. As the line supervisors did not permit them to apply for leave, they had to wait for their turn on the night shift, and during the day steal away to Guangzhou. By May, about 20 assembly department workers had paid for tests at the Guangdong Hospital. Li Tong remembers:

*The factory arranged check ups at the end of 2003, but only for those in the milling shop or with 10 years service. The factory actively tried to prevent the rest of us from getting check-ups which made us all very scared. When I saw them going off for check ups, I felt we were just neglected and this made me angry. Yi Zhixiong went for a test, and looked up the information, which said these pains were caused by cadmium. I told Cheng Siqiong,<sup>6</sup> but she rebuked me.*

*Everybody on the third floor was scared and went to the milling shop to ask what to do because the factory would not give them check-ups. When my younger sister was hospitalised, she rang me to see if I would go to Guangzhou for a test. We looked for information on the internet, and this pain was not normal, it was caused by cadmium. I went for a check-up on March 20. My sister got the results for me and told me I was over the limit. That worried me and made me cry as I didn't know what to do.*

*I started at the factory in 1997 and learned all the jobs there. Then in 2001, my shoulders began to ache. I thought it must be flu and went for a jab. Cheng Siqiong,*

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5 There were disagreement between workers in the milling shop and those in the assembly shop as to which workshop had more cadmium dust. Workers in Advance Battery's assembly department had collectively applied for an allowance on the grounds that their jobs were equally dirty, but the factory disagreed.

6 Cheng Siqiong was a line supervisor in the assembly department. In the end she also tested with excess level, and was placed under observation, and even joined in the legal suit.

*the line supervisor was angry with me and said "I'm sick to death of you. If it's not your head aching, it's your back, you young people ache all day long."*

*Thinking about it more, I knew something was wrong. In mid-April I went for another blood test to see if I was still over the limit, and I was. I still didn't know what to do about it. I got more and more worried and couldn't concentrate on anything.*

When more workers went for medical checks of their own accord and found out they too were cadmium excessive, they approached management demanding a fair and reasonable response. But the responses were the following:

'You go for checks, but how on earth do we know whether you had asked your fellow workers to do the test for you!'

'Don't tell anyone about this. Or there will be panic.'

'You are spreading rumours!'

When workers demanded that the factory arrange physical check-ups and further tests, they replied:

'Only the milling shop workers are qualified for tests, no other workers from other workshops are allowed to do that!'

And on negotiation:

'If you trust the factory, then we can talk about that; if you don't, just forget it.'

Or future health of the workers:

'You might get cancer from contact with cadmium; you might get cancer

if you don't contact cadmium, but we can't guarantee that you won't get cancer in seven or 20 years.'

On the workers campaign

'You want to sue us? Go ahead! And you will see that we can stop you at every step you take!'

'Go on to petition! Go and petition Beijing! Kick up a fuss! See where you can get.'

In all about 50 people from the assembly department paid for their own tests in Guangzhou between May and June. During this time two or three people resigned every day. By May, one third of workers in the assembly department had resigned in the face of management's ongoing refusal to provide safe working conditions to workers, on top of the fact that the management had maintained a hard line policy in dealing with workers. Another factor which prompted workers to leave was the fact that workers had not been organised and therefore had no faith in collective struggles. Thus even workers with excessive cadmium chose to resign. Production was seriously affected. When more and more workers followed, the management did not even bother to issue them official confirmation of their resignation.

In hindsight the management of the Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd. should be grateful to the resigned workers even though they affected production at that time. Without this wave of resignations, which included workers who had excessive cadmium levels, the total number of workers with excessive cadmium levels might have exceeded 400.

### **Managers and Line Supervisors: From Cooperation to Confrontation**

In the factory, production chains were referred to as lines. A line supervisor (*la zhang* in Chinese pinyin) looks after the production in the line. Usually



line supervisors were promoted from ordinary workers. A workshop had several production lines, referred to as 'line one', 'line two' etc. each with its own line supervisor. Higher up there was the general line manager who has authority over the individual line supervisors. On top of general line managers there stood the managerial people.

At Power Pack factory the production manager Liu Xinhua was described by workers as a bandit like person. He was the boss there, capable and powerful. But it is always the management's tactic to have good cop bad cop. The manager of the Assembly workshop, Cai Chunqiao, joined in with repressing the workers as well, but he was less aggressive because he played the good cop role.

It was said of Cai Chunqiao,

*Old Cai treats all workers well, speaks modestly and amiably, is accommodating whenever possible, such as recruiting the countrymen of migrant workers if requested. But he is very hard on line supervisors, who he keeps on a short leash, and makes them ensure that workers work to meet production targets. Line supervisors cannot be nice to front line workers; only he can.*

At this stage, most line supervisors remained highly aloof from the workers and sided with management. This was only to be expected as in a factory hierarchy, the line supervisors' basic job was to squeeze the workers into working harder and some of them carried out their duties with particular harshness. One of the chief concerns among line supervisors was to avoid being demoted back to the level of ordinary worker which many of them had sweated to rise above. Being a line supervisor – a position which was graded into junior and senior levels – also meant higher wages. Senior line supervisors earn 1000 yuan a month more than ordinary workers. That's why 'line supervisors cannot be nice to front line workers'.

Cheng Xiang described how the managers pressed the line supervisors to raise

productivity without regard to the health of both the line supervisors and common workers:

*Old Zeng, a foreman, put the line supervisors on a short leash. On the night shift, he prohibited us from leaving our posts in order to eat. It turned out that both line supervisors and workers had to take food in the workshop. Old Zeng were meaner than Old Cai. At least Old Cai stuck to the rules, but Old Zeng didn't. He said that factory rules were for workers to obey, not management. (While we had to stick to our post) he hardly ever went to the shop floor on a night shift. He just chatted with the machine mechanic or stayed in his office.*

But when things got worse, the line supervisors gradually moved from policing the workers to sympathising with them, eventually offering advice and organising against management. Some even led strikes. They slowly realised that they too were victims, and were subject to the factories' malicious acts and deception. Management had initially tried to sweeten them by allowing senior line supervisors to join the initial two medical check-ups on December 30, 2003 and February 24, 2004. According to line supervisor Liu Qingxiu:

*When it all started off last year the line supervisors began by playing ball with management and keeping an eye on the workers. Then management called a meeting and asked us to tell the workers that cadmium could be discharged from their bodies by drinking plenty of water and urinating regularly. Some of us went along with this but others, including me, were worried about our own health and in fact were kept informed by the workers actions.*

*There was one incident that really disgusted the line supervisors. Old Cai announced at a meeting that several line supervisors who had been at the factory since 1994 had tested negative for excess cadmium. He said that everybody could relax, and the junior line supervisors should faithfully assist their senior supervisors. But this time he really shot himself in the foot. Other line supervisors were very angry because he had been selective about who could be tested. Later many of them also found out*

*that they too suffered from overexposure of cadmium. After most of the cadmium affected supervisors and workers resigned in September 2004, some line supervisors were among the first group of people who took their case to court.*

**Another line supervisor, Cao Menghua recalled:**

*In May 2004, the assembly department on the third floor went on a strike. We in the milling shop were supposed to be “without excessive cadmium levels”, but we did not believe it. However we could do nothing. At the same time, production at the department fell and old hands were resigning. Those left behind went on a go-slow and morale plummeted. It was the same for me. At one point I had been a responsible line supervisor but then I just let it go. As long as I could provide enough semi-products for the assembly department to work on, I did not care to make my fellow workers produce more than enough, which we used to do to prepare for reserves.*

It's said that there were some quite honest managers in the factory. When the furor began, some said in private that a separate production line should be set up for workers with excess levels and they should be exempted from meeting production targets.

*At the very beginning, a staff member in the personnel department, whose name was Xiao Fenglan and who came from Hong Kong, was furious at the local managers and scolded them for failing to maintain better working conditions. Surely she had to shield their faults as well? Anyway, when the disputes began to intensify, she simply stepped aside.*

The factory was rarely a place for displays of ‘compassion’ or ‘humanity’. Profits and unit costs were the bywords of all productive activity, and non-productive activity was out of bounds in the factory. Workers told of a manager from Hong Kong who lobbied for pay rises for the workers and provided a water drinking room. But when he was replaced, the room was used for storage instead.

### **Seventeen go on strike in May**

In early May seventeen people whose own tests showed excess levels of cadmium went on strike. They struck for more than 2 weeks. Two of them were from the milling shop and the rest worked in the assembly department on the third floor. Cheng Xiang, a line supervisor in the assembly department, paid for a check up at the Guangdong Hospital, which showed a several times excess cadmium level in her blood and urine. She demanded that the factory arrange a test, but the boss said she did not qualify. This simply increased the general levels of anxiety among the workers. If a line supervisor's excess level could be so severe, what were the implications for the workers who came into direct contact with cadmium dust? Not all those who had an excessive level of cadmium joined the strike. But the seventeen strong strikeeoked was a great initiative from below. Cheng Xiang recalls,

*After I got the results, I went to see department manager Old Cai who wanted to shut us up. He agreed to transfer me to carrying out general odd jobs but soon repented, fearing that my hanging around was no good to them. So he put me to work as an ordinary worker in the Combination Shop on the second floor. Other workers with excess levels had also been transferred to this department.*

*Old Cai seemed to want us to go, making us work eight hours a day with no overtime, which meant only earning four or five hundred yuan. Workers had to work overtime in order to earn enough money. After my demotion, Old Cai said as a former line supervisor I would have a few perks and could work as much as I wanted. But Old Cai made the line supervisor work us faster to meet production targets, so I went to the office and slapped Old Cai's table. I said I worked as an assembly line worker only for six months after joining the factory, and since then had done seven or eight years as a line supervisor, and now he wanted me to produce enough to meet the target? How could that be? I was suffering from an occupational illness! According to the Law on Occupational Disease, I should not suffer a drop in wages or conditions! And then I quoted the relevant article of the law to him as proof'.*

*He said, "If the line supervisor is pressing your production rate, I will give her a ticking off. Next time you feel like it, just do as much or as little you wish, and if you want to knock off, then do so" I told him that was fine. Then I said that working without overtime, the pay was too low, and asked for two hours' overtime. Then I went to work. Those working with me followed my example and worked overtime too. Old Cai came and said they hadn't been given overtime so they should stop that. But the workers working with me replied that if the line supervisor could work overtime, why couldn't they?*

*By the time we were sent to work in the Combination Shop, our pay and working conditions suffered degradation. The shop was also poorly managed. Most workers were resentful. Those of us with excess levels had opportunities to talk with each other and discuss countermeasures. We felt there was no way out of working here at such low pay. We should just demand for follow-up tests. We should just start making a fuss. If the management ever showed some concern for us, we wouldn't go so far.*

**Another participant, Zheng Chunhong, recalls:**

*We went to management to demand treatment "to resolve our problem", but they said we were not suitably qualified. We clocked on every day, but refused to enter the workshop. We stayed by the entrance looking out for senior management, but they avoided us. If they saw workers gathering at the front gate, they went in through the back door.*

*We chatted with Li Ya's husband who helped us, and every day went to their place. He and Liu Youping got information from the internet then took it to petition the Sanitation Bureau, Bureau for Letters and Calls. They went from one department to the next asking for help with clearing up our problem. The factory sent people to talk with us in order to persuade us to drop our actions. The factory was always dragging its feet, always deceiving us. One day we got angry and threw things at the office door and kicked up a big fuss. The security staff barred our entry, and we didn't dare try to charge into the office itself. Then one remarkable character with*

*slight connections to the factory leaders showed up demanding a check-up, and the security didn't dare do anything to him. When we saw him going upstairs towards the office we dashed after him. At that time the manager Liu Xinhua, who was in the milling shop, saw us in the security room getting ready to dash upstairs, and he immediately went into hiding.*

*For the moment most of the workers did not join the strike because they did not know whether they too had excessive cadmium.*

*'However the management simply ignored us as we stayed on strike. We looked up the Hong Kong Gold Peak fax number and sent our information and names. It reported back to the management here and the department manager told us that since we had caused absolute pandemonium he would kick all of us out of the factory when things quietened down. I said we wouldn't wait for him to kick us out because we no longer bothered to stay in the factory anyway.*

*The most active person among the 17 strikers was Liu Youping, who did lots for everybody. He became the workers' representative in May 2004. We had meetings in a worker's boarding place that faced the gate of Power Pack. Everyday workers off duty spontaneously gathered there, discussing problems and exchanging information. Liu Youping persuaded workers to hand in 50 yuan each to cover costs of the collective protest such as the fax to Hong Kong.*

*More and more workers were testing with excessive cadmium levels. Liu Youping persuaded many of them to come to the worker's boarding place, discussing issues like how to pressure the factory for a follow-up test. Money in the kitty reached hundreds of yuan as several dozens of workers contributed even if they weren't taking strike action. Workers representatives led by Liu Youping collectively petitioned government departments in Huizhou. The factory, fearing that Liu Youping and two other workers might influence more workers to take actions, decided to send the three to hospital to isolate them from others. In the hospital he discussed cadmium-related infectious symptoms very fluently with the doctors. People at the*

*hospital said that he should not be just a worker but deserved some better jobs as he was so capable and so good with words. He fixed everything for us and really helped us all. If it wasn't for him, we would never have been hospitalised. The factory's test showed he had no excess levels. Later those of us in hospital all chipped in 10 yuan a piece so he could have his own test. Later his own test showed he had none, so there was nothing we could do. If his tests had shown excess levels, that would really have started something.*

During this phase, workers built on their own knowledge, experience and morale. Gold Peak managers were furious with local managers blaming them for the bad publicity. The local managers in turn took out their anger on the workers. But they had no serious, well considered tactics, and even avoided meeting workers when they wanted to see them; in the words of the workers, 'They treated us as though we had infectious diseases.'

### **Provincial Women's Federation gets involved**

May 21, 2004

The striking workers did succeed in pressing the management to send them for check ups and medical treatment. However, to the surprise of many workers, the management arranged tests for the whole assembly department's workers as well. It might be the somewhat dramatic entry into the fray of the All China Women's Federation of Guangdong province (ACWF) that startled Power Pack's management into making more concessions than it wished. ACWF is the official "mass organisation" for women. Though it does not enjoy governmental power, nevertheless its provincial level officials are still considered by lower level officials and individual factory management as upper level officials who enjoy wide connections with the provincial government.

A male colleague of Cheng Xiang told us:

*At that time, the factory repressed us and Li Dan, one of the workers involved became very anxious. She kept asking, what we should do? I reminded her that the Provincial Women's Federation had contacted her when she was hospitalized. "You are a woman. You can telephone the Women's Federation." The next day, a small convey of cars from the Provincial Women's Federation arrived at the factory throwing management into a panic. They immediately sent us all back to Guangzhou for tests.*

When the ACWF delegation, headed by the chief named Huang, came to the factory, they brought along the Xiaojinkou town women's federation and other officials, filling several vehicles. This was the first time the Xiaojinkou government had become involved in the issue, reflecting the fact that the workers action was drawing in people with power and influence despite the efforts of management. The ACWF's arrival also gave the workers some hope:

*The afternoon when the Women's Federation people arrived, I had a real headache, and didn't go to work. But later when I heard the Women's Federation had arrived, I told my husband I was going to the factory. After all wasn't the Women's Federation there to serve working women?*

The provincial Women's Federation brought with them a 'specialist' named Chen Jiabin. He was also department head of the Guangdong Hospital, and had come to carry out 'training work' and to explain 'preventive knowledge on cadmium poisoning'. Li Tong recalled,

*We were told that he was a specialist, and he played us a DVD (on cadmium). Each assembly line was asked to send representatives to attend the meeting with the idea that these representatives would then pass on the information to the employees in general. Old Cai make me sit at the front. I said that was OK and that I had nothing to fear. Chen Jiabin told us that cadmium posed no great danger to the human body, and was no big deal. As long as we drank plenty of water and urinated frequently, then the body was able to discharge the cadmium without complications. And it wouldn't affect our children. That was when I could listen*



*no more and left. I said that he was misleading us with this, and then I told them that if he was a specialist, he was a specialist in bullshit. And he was no specialist. Where on earth was the proof? Show us some evidence I yelled. Our line supervisor Cheng Siqiong said that I was going too far, and told me to keep quiet.*

*I already knew the cadmium things, and told my fellow workers. He still thought that we just knew nothing!*

*ACWF department head Huang spoke. She urged us to carefully implement the preventive measures, and that the factory management had been good to us. I approached her with my results of the tests which I had made of my own account and she agreed that I did have an excessive cadmium level. And I showed her a filthy old face mask, and asked what use it was. I told her it was smelly because they only gave us a change every few days. She agreed that it was too dirty, and tried to console us. The meeting carried on in the afternoon and the factory's bosses, managers, personnel department, our section managers, the Xiaojinkou Women's Federation, and more than 10 of us employees attended. The meeting did not finish till after six in the evening.*

The involvement of the ACWF's soon proved to be a false alarm because the ACWF did nothing to challenge the management. But at the beginning the management had no idea what the ACWF's involvement might lead to. It was probably because of this that the management sent some workers for a second treatment. It also led to blood tests for cadmium for all the workers in the assembly department. Moreover, Power Pack's management announced on May 23 that it was stopping the production of nickel cadmium batteries. Beginning on May 24, doctors from the Occupational Disease Hospital took blood samples from 540 workers in the assembly shop in batches of around 100 workers.

The involvement of the Provincial Women's Federation was undoubtedly a helpful turn of events as it might have prompted the management to take more actions than it wanted. Yet, the ACWF disappeared from the struggle as quickly as it had entered, leaving the workers to fight on their own, this time for the truth of the laboratory test results.

**‘We are not ignorant children! Stop Cheating Us!’**

Assembly shop workers’ strike in mid-June

Hospitalised workers received a letter from the Power Pack factory boss Xie Qijiang on May 27. It stressed that:

‘Excessive levels of cadmium in the blood are nothing to worry about. Developments in modern day medical science can treat this illness!’

It looked like the management is responding to workers’ grievances by making tests for the 540 workers in the assembly shop on May 24. But it soon turned out that making the management look after the health of the workers was more difficult than the workers had thought. The factory simply refused to disclose the results of health checks. Workers who asked were told that the hospital test results were not ready. They did not believe it, so they rang the Guangdong Hospital and asked the specialist Chen Jiabin about their test results. He told them that ‘a fat guy from the factory took the results long ago’. The workers then knew that the factory was withholding the test results. So the workers were again forced to strike just to obtain the original documentation of the test results. Cheng Xiang recalled,

*I and Tan Yiqing and I bumped into Chen Jianfen on our way to the personnel office. She told us that we could get the test results from Chen Chaodong but he was away on business just then.’*

*I said: ‘Well how can they delay the release of such important information just because somebody is on a business trip? They can’t lie to us like this as though we are a bunch of primary school kids!’*

*Tan told her that she had rung the Guangdong Hospital and was told the results had been picked up a couple of days ago. Chen Jianfen hadn’t finished her reply when Liu Xinhua spotted us by chance and asked us why we weren’t working instead of kicking up a fuss there. So we told him that the hospital said the test results had been picked*

*up long ago, so why didn't they give them out.*

*Liu expressed surprise: 'Oh were they? I will ring the Guangdong Hospital to enquire.'*

*He added that the personnel office couldn't interfere and we should come along to the production department. Chen Jianfen took her chance to leave. When we arrived at Liu Xinhua's office, he and old Old Cai told us that we had to listen properly and think about things clearly. He asked us what did we think we were doing? He then told us that when his mother fell and broke her leg, she couldn't afford treatment. So those doctors left her aside until she passed away in despair. He tried to sue the hospital but eventually he just could not succeed. He said that society was dark and cruel for people like us, and lots of bad things happened to people, but workers shouldn't fight with the factory, it was like trying to split a stone with an egg. He advised us to forget all about it.*

*I replied, 'It's your very words that pushed us to go on strike.'*

*Then we returned to the workshops and told everybody that the factory had intercepted our test result documents. On the second day, lots of workers dashed into Old Cai's office, demanding the original documents. A few workers started taking more initiative and boldly discouraged others who were still working. They told their fellow workers that since the management did not send us for treatment and failed to deliver the test results to us, why then should we continue to work? Soon other workers stopped working as well, and then they were followed by more.*

For three days, from 9 to 11 of June, approximately 500 employees from the assembly shop went on strike. They clocked on, went to the production lines, but refused to work, sitting or standing at their workstations instead. The women workers were not too afraid of retaliation as they might have done before, because there were so many fellow workers joining the strike.

The factory issued each worker with a small slip of paper that looked a bit like a wage slip, bearing the person's full name, work number, and blood test result. The test results showed: 121 of 540 workers had excess levels of cadmium in their blood; nearly all the older workers had excessive levels, two of whom were pregnant, one seven months gone and the other three months. All the people listed with excess levels were crying and the sound of weeping filled the workshops. The workers who were the most diligent were also those with the most excessive levels. Workers could no longer control their emotions. Nobody could have expected that so many years of hard work could have come to such an ending. Workers without excessive levels counted themselves lucky and were almost ecstatic.

But the affair was not finished, as the delight of those workers apparently in the clear soon turned to doubt. Some of the first workers to pay for their own tests, and who had been found to have excess levels of cadmium in their blood, discovered that this test result showed no excess levels. Other workers who had paid for their own tests and seriously exceeded the levels, now showed only minor excess levels. The media reported heavily on this aspect of the case. For example:

‘On May 24 the factory’s assembly shop took blood samples. The next day Chen Jinfeng went again to the Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention where another result emerged: the results of blood samples taken in the factory had registered 1.5 microgrammes per litre, but those done privately in Huizhou were 8.7 microgrammes per litre. Later some workers went to enquire in the Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and were told that the machine was broken that day, and only the results provided by the factory should be considered valid.’<sup>7</sup>

Seeds of doubt were thus planted, and more workers paid for private check-ups

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7 See ‘Hundreds of workers suspected excess cadmium levels: Cloud of Suspicion over Huizhou Gold Peak Chaoba Batteries Factory’ by Tian Yanhong and Zhang Peng in *China Business*, July 18, 2004.

which provided further evidence that results could vary considerably. Meanwhile the factory continued to refuse to acknowledge the results of these private tests, even if they were conducted by the same hospital. Instead they attached acceptance of their published results as a precondition for negotiations declaring, to the workers' astonishment: 'Believe us or there will be no talks.' But the workers responded that the discrepancy between the two tests made it hard to trust the management. They demanded that the factory give them the original documentation of the test results from the hospital. On June 12 – 18 these workers struck again.

**Zheng chunhong recalled:**

*The strike was sparked when the factory's tests showed many workers with excess levels. None of them were working, staying out of the workshops. Sounds of weeping echoed through the workshop and offices at that time. I was feeling strong though, not weeping, just wanting to fight back and demand they settle the problem. My situation was different from many of the others. I was a local Huizhou native and living at home (unlike other migrant workers who had no family here and were alone). I couldn't afford to break down in front of my family. I simply told my husband that I was over the limit, not complaining or weeping, not wanting my children and family to notice anything. My youngest said naively:*

*"My God! So many people are poisoned or have excessive levels, it's a good job me and big sister were born so early (therefore not affected by cadmium when they were still foetuses)."*

*The factory promised it would issue the original results in a few days and in the meantime wanted us back at work. So we went back and sat in the workshop, not wanting to do anything. It was just like being on strike, with no production. We drank water all day or strolled out onto the balconies even though the section managers wanted 600 units produced in an hour. When the boss saw how we were acting, he told us our wages would depend on the production quota i.e. we were being switched to piece work.*

*But the workers didn't care – if that was how he wanted it, there was nothing we could do, we just wanted to get hold of the proper test results and receive treatment if necessary. Wages didn't matter, we were concerned for our health.*

*The section managers called the workers individually out onto the balconies to ask why nobody was working when everybody was quite capable. They showed their teeth to the more timid workers, but they felt helpless with the bolder ones. When he told me to get working I replied:*

*'Aren't you telling us to drink plenty of water? We are drinking as much as we can, and that means we have to keep going to the toilet, so how can we get on with production?'*

*The manager Luo said, "What's the matter with you all? What are you kicking up a fuss about now? After this, none of you will get any wages at all."*

*I told them: 'We don't give a damn, and we will keep kicking up a fuss until we get none.'*

They demanded admission to hospital and treatment to discharge the cadmium. The factory declared that since excessive cadmium in the urine was the criterion for chronic cadmium poisoning, then cadmium in the blood did not count. So the workers demanded tests for cadmium in their urine. On June 14 the factory gave in to the strike but only arranged urine tests for 121 workers with excess levels of cadmium in their blood.

To stop workers who had paid for their own tests from making trouble, on June 17 the factory management pasted up a notice saying it was not permitted for individual workers to go to hospital for tests, and they would not accept test results from those who had paid for their own.

Meanwhile workers at the Advance Battery went on strike on June 14 demanding check-ups. Observing that the situation was becoming very serious, the gov-

ernment finally intervened, and promised to send to hospital all Power Pack employees with excess levels of cadmium in their urine. Cheng Xiang recalls:

*That day Old Cai came to see me inviting me to meet Xu Guang, the deputy mayor. We took a company car to the Labor Bureau. On the way Liu Xinhua told us that Xu Guang was from Hubei and used to be a big wheel at Desay before transferring to the municipal government and then rising to deputy mayor. We drove to the court of arbitration where Xu introduced us to senior government departmental officials arriving. Xu said that he had the test results with him, that he sympathised with our plight, and that the government had arranged a list of hospital admissions for us.*

The urine test results of the 121 workers showed that 106 of them had excess cadmium levels.<sup>8</sup> Arrangements to hospitalise workers began on June 19.

The strike in the assembly department stirred the milling shop workers to start fighting again for check-ups.

*In June when the assembly shop workers went for tests, all us workers in the milling shop demanded checks for cadmium in our urine, because the tests in May were for cadmium in our blood, so in June those who had tested normal did not qualify for cadmium in urine tests. Chen Jianfen, the personnel office manager, said: "if you had no excess cadmium in your blood, why should you be tested for cadmium in your urine?" We milling shop workers got very angry and surrounded Chen to demand tests. Then some of us went on strike, but it didn't last long as the bosses conceded and promised tests. However they wouldn't give a date and we had to wait until August 14.*

As was the case with the May testing of cadmium in the blood, the two urine test

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<sup>8</sup> Other reports stated that there were 115 people with excess cadmium in urine, and must have included people who had been tested previously with excess levels. It is worth noting that these 121 people had urine tests on 14 June. And the results were ready on 18 June, just four days after the tests. In all previous and subsequent tests workers always waited several weeks, and had to press for them to the extent of striking, before the factory would release the results.

results arranged by the management from June to October 2004 also aroused suspicions among workers. They then went for private tests in different hospitals which often created more suspicions. (More below)

### **The Intervention from Beijing and Hong Kong**

In the midst of the struggle, in August 2, an expert group of five from the Ministry of Health in Beijing, led by Professor Huang Jinxiang, arrived Huizhou to "provide guidance" to the cadmium poisoning case there. Although workers were generally not aware of the visit, and it was only briefly reported in the news, it was still significant because it is rare that the Ministry will be bothered by a single case (though of late there have been other cases of outbreaks) of an occupational disease outbreak. What is more, the local government had been working hard to censor any news reports so as not to alert higher level governments, and the Ministries would be the last level of government that the Huizhou government ever wanted to alert. The Municipal government succeeded to censor news reports until July 2004, when something unexpectedly occurred.

Globalization Monitor, a Hong Kong based NGO, learnt of the case in June. After some investigation they leaked the news to Hong Kong media. On July 3, the *Oriental Daily*, a very popular newspaper, broke the news with the headline "Cadmium Poisoning Panic in the GP Battery Factory". In the following days, correspondents from Hong Kong went to Guangzhou and Huizhou one after another to investigate and report on the case. The Hong Kong media's coverage of the case gave a green light to Mainland media outside Huizhou, and the latter now made similar reports. Meanwhile Globalization Monitor, with the support of local groups, staged a protest against GP on July 23. According to the South China Morning Post the next day,

"A scuffle broke out yesterday when more than 40 representatives of labour and human rights groups stormed the headquarters of GP Batteries. The protesters were railing against the company's alleged violation of workers' rights in Huizhou, Guangdong. Representatives from 33 organizations, including Globaliza-



tion Monitor, the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, joined forces to press Gold Peak Industries - the owner of GP Batteries - to pay medical fees and other compensation to workers allegedly poisoned by cadmium at two factories.”

Also present in the protest were NWSC (Neighborhood and Workers’ Services Center), AMRC (Asia Monitor Resource Centre), and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese.<sup>9</sup>

Encouraged by more media coverage and the Hong Kong groups’ solidarity actions, the workers became bolder in their fight throughout July. It looked like things were running out of the hands of both GP and the local government and might by now have alerted the Ministry of Health. Hence they sent the specialists to Huizhou on August 2. According to a news report, the specialists endorsed all medical examinations and diagnosis concerning cadmium, conducted by local authorities. But they were also reported as saying that those having excessive cadmium levels must be re-examined and monitored every year, and that those being diagnosed as having cadmium poisoning must be treated, as required by law. The intervention of the Ministry probably carried some weight in urging the local authorities to act less arbitrarily.

### **Suspicious of forgery**

Fluctuation in test results of concentration of cadmium in blood is not unusual. That is why it is not considered to be a reliable criterion for making diagnosis of chronic cadmium poisoning. In contrast, the amount of excretion of urinary cadmium is relatively less unstable. According to our own investigations, the discrepancy between the two urine test results of some workers was enormous. The case of a woman worker HYY is particularly telling. On June 21, 2004 her urinary cadmium was 292 $\mu\text{mol/mol Cr}$  which was 58 times the normal level, and then in the second test on 1 July it dropped to 1.6  $\mu\text{mol/mol Cr}$ . It implied

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<sup>9</sup> More groups joined the campaign against GP later, for instance the newly founded SACOM (Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviors) and LAC (Labour Action China).

a discrepancy of 182.5 times between the tests within a time lag of just ten days. We have compiled a table of ten workers' cases which all showed serious doubts about the tests. (See appendix).

HYY's urine cadmium level, which reached 292 $\mu\text{mol}/\text{mol}$ , is abnormally high. The management once accused workers with abnormally high cadmium levels of fabricating urine samples by putting cadmium powder into the urine. But it is not convincing. Cadmium oxide is red in colour, therefore if it dissolves in urine then the sample will turn red, which is easily noticeable. As a matter of fact, cadmium only dissolves in strong acid like nitric acid, and cannot effectively dissolve in urine. So the powder is visible in urine samples and medical staff can easily notice any forgery.

There was no direct evidence to prove that the two Huizhou plants colluded with local government to fabricate medical documents. Still, there were lots of irregularities concerning these medical tests which made workers' suspicions justified:

- 1 ) It is quite improbable that the discrepancy between two urine tests results, taken within ten days, could have reached 182.5 times. If this is the case, then according to Sherry Baron, MD of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, " when blood or urine levels vary so significantly it is necessary to repeat all of the measurements, conduct a history and physical examination, and make a medical judgment based on all of the clinical information." <sup>10</sup> However, the management of the two Huizhou plants or the hospitals failed to act accordingly, but rather tended to stop further testing once the second test showed that the cadmium level had returned to 'normal', even when there were huge discrepancies between the two tests and when the workers concerned took private tests results which still showed excessive cadmium levels. It inappropriately denied many workers the right to further laboratory investigations.

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10 Correspondence with Sherry Baron, May 18, 2008.

- 2 ) It is not right for the factory to first conduct blood tests and then made excessive cadmium in the blood a necessary condition for further urine tests. This arbitrary procedure disqualified many workers from the right to have urine tests. In the US, in order to assess cadmium exposure in workers all three of the biological monitoring measures should be conducted:
  - a ) Blood cadmium
  - b ) Urine cadmium
  - c ) Urine B2-microglobulins

In China, according to the Diagnostic Criteria for Occupational Cadmium Poisoning (GBZ17-2002), cadmium in the blood is not a listed criteria for the diagnosis of chronic cadmium poisoning because it is not reliable. It is only useful for assessing recent exposure to cadmium (see Chapter one). Therefore what the hospitals should have done was to conduct both blood and urine cadmium tests. Their failure to do so definitely made workers' suspicions justified.

- 3 ) It was inappropriate that the factories, at least in the initial period, refused to release the original test results to workers. The latter were entitled to get the original results. It was also natural that a lot of suspicion on the part of the workers was aroused when the management refused to accept the private test results of workers, even when they had been conducted in the same hospitals as those carried about by the management.
- 4 ) With regards to the hospital, at least in the early stage, it failed to conduct creatinine adjustment (or Cr for short) in its laboratory investigation of urinary cadmium excretion, and as such violated the "Diagnostic Criteria of Occupational Cadmium Poisoning GBZ17-2002" enacted in 2002. The 2002 standard made creatinine adjustment compulsory for the testing of urinary cadmium excretion, while the old standard in 1987 only made creatinine adjustment optional. Implementing a new standard was necessary

because the sole examination of the concentration of cadmium oxide in the urine is not precise; when the subject drinks a lot of water before the test, the concentration of cadmium in the urine will dramatically decrease in a short time. To correct such distortions, creatinine adjustment is required. Creatinine is a nitrogenous organic acid that naturally occurs in vertebrates and helps to supply energy to muscle cells. It is stable and does not fluctuate when the subject drinks water. However, the tests results released by the Guangdong Hospital in the first half of 2004 showed no creatinine adjustment for the testing of the concentration of cadmium in urine. It was also the time when medical officers at the hospital told workers to drink a lot of water. Whatever the intention of the hospital officials, the combined results of asking patients to drink a lot of water and failing to make creatinine adjustments was incorrect test results, or at least an under-estimation of the urinary cadmium levels of patients. We found out about this error and told workers to demand an explanation from the hospital staff. Then from the beginning of June 2004 all tests results showed that there was creatinine adjusted. However, the hospital never acknowledged its mistakes and never explained why the older measurement was used in the former tests.

On September 7, 2004, Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd. published another statement in response to the press reports accusing the hospital and factory of colluding to fabricate the test results. Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd. emphasized that the procedures had complied with the law and that it was not possible to fake the results.

The statement had a hollow ring to it especially in comparison to the detailed media reports accusing the company.

### **Officials' Dereliction of Duty**

Though there is no direct evidence that the hospitals and local governments forged medical documents, it is beyond doubt that different levels of government were involved and that their respective departments had helped the Gold Peak

factories in Huizhou to cover up their misbehaviour when they should have penalised them.

The local Xiaojinkou Town Labour Bureau was directly responsible for overseeing labour conditions in the township where Power Pack was located. When interviewed by Hong Kong reporter, Mr. Zhang, the head of the labour bureau there, stated that the factory – Power Pack – complied with the laws and regulations, and was one of the better employers in Huizhou city.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, a worker recalls:

*Zhang just told us to drink plenty of water. These people had no regard for our fellow workers. They just came to keep us quiet. At some point they sent a public order team to harass us.*

Many workers appealed to higher level government departments including the Huizhou Municipal government, the Labour Supervision department, and the Sanitation Supervision department. Their effort was in vain. Workers also contacted the Huizhou local media but their story was not reported.

Yu Chaoying was the vice director of the Sanitation Bureau in Huizhou. In August 2004, Yu told a journalist from China Newsweek that, “in December 2002, when the Sanitation Bureau inspected Power Pack, they found the concentration of cadmium oxide particles in the air was too high. The Sanitation Bureau ordered Power Pack to improve. By the end of 2003, a second inspection revealed normal levels. We then recorded five locations in the factory with excessive levels of cadmium oxide particles when it was inspected again in May 2004.”<sup>12</sup>

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11 The Hong Kong-based labour NGO China Labour Bulletin conducted a telephone interview with the head of the township labour bureau via its programme broadcast by Radio Free Asia, broadcast on August 21 and 28 respectively.

12 See Liu Lingli, ‘Huizhou: cadmium poisoning leads to tense labour relations’ in *China News Weekly*, August 9, 2004, Volume 29/2004, issue 191.

We are sure that he has not told the whole truth. Globalization Monitor has evidence that in March 2003, three months after the alleged inspection in December 2002, which found that the Power Pack factory had excessive cadmium in the air, the situation had not changed at all. We have obtained a copy of a report named "The Sanitation Evaluating Report" drafted by Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention on March 3, 2003, in which Power Pack was evaluated. According to the report, Huizhou Centre conducted an inspection on February 23-25, 2003. This unpublished report displays that the concentration of cadmium oxide particles in air was ten times the legal limit. The original text states:

"According to 'GBZ2-2002 Occupational Exposure Limit for Hazardous Agents in the Workplace', Permissible Concentration-Short Term Exposure Limit of cadmium oxide is  $0.02\text{mg}/\text{m}^3$ , the corresponding data of the inspection is  $0.204\text{mg}/\text{m}^3$  in the Cadmium Powder Transmission site of Milling Shop. This is ten times the normal level. Of eight work sites, two had concentrations of cadmium oxide particles over the legal limit by up to 25 per cent. Two work sites had concentrations of cadmium oxide particles which reached the upper limit of national Maximum Allowable Concentration."

According to China's Law on Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases, when 'The existence of serious occupational diseases in an employment unit is discovered', the health administration department has the responsibility to 'promptly adopt control measures according to law' including 'ordering temporary closure of the operations that caused the occupational diseases or harmful accidents', seal off related material and equipment, control the scene of the mishap, conduct physical checks on employees associated with tasks involving poisonous chemicals, and also to order factory management to send sick workers to hospital.

Early in 2002, the sanitation bureau had found that the concentration of cad-

mium oxide particles in the air was illegally high and ordered Power Pack to improve. However, Power Pack failed to comply with this order. Why? Shouldn't the authorities have penalized the factory and ordered it to make all remedial measures once they found out that the factory had failed again in the inspection in March 2003? And why did the authorities fail to order the factory to arrange tests for potential victims of excessive cadmium levels after the inspection of March 2003? Why did the authorities only act passively and unwillingly in early 2004, when they were confronted by affected workers? Is this not a very clear case of official dereliction of duty?

According to the Item 3 of Article 77 of "Law of the People's Republic of China on Work Safety", officials "failing to perform their duty of supervision and control over production units and who are unable to ensure production safety, are liable for administrative penalties or even criminal charges." As far as we have been able to ascertain, no officials in Huizhou have been punished for dereliction of duty.

When the case was reported for the first time in Hong Kong, the Gold Peak group issued a press release defending its record: "Power Pack obtained ISO14000 certification in 2001, demonstrating that Power Pack applied international standards on production safety, and the discharge of pollutants. All of the factory's production operations and safety management comply with national legal regulations enacted by Chinese government and the Huizhou authorities."

We have already demonstrated that until March 2003, the Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention had found that the concentration of cadmium oxide particles in the air was ten times over the legal limit. It was impossible for Power Pack to be ignorant of The Sanitation Evaluating Report on which the common seal of Power Pack was sealed. It proved that Power Pack violated knowingly the relevant laws and that its production operations and safety management' failed to comply with legal regulations enacted by Chinese govern-

ment.

The situation in the JetPower factory in Shenzhen was similar. We found a copy of meeting minutes on production safety as early as July 19, 2002, two years before the explosion of cadmium poisoning. They state:

### **Part Two, Supervising Report**

The vice general manager reported the inspection result that was conducted by 5 staff from the Sanitation Supervision Department on July 12. The inspection was very detailed. In it six violations were disclosed.

- 1 ) The conditions in work sites violated occupational health and safety regulations: there were no relevant prevention measures for using organic solvents;
- 2 ) Failure to provide articles to prevent workers from occupational diseases in the bitumen shop on the second floor;
- 3 ) Failure to set up Caution Marks and Chinese-English warning signs in workshops with noisy machines and organic solvents were placed on the first floor and another floor;
- 4 ) Failure to provide occupational health training for workers;
- 5 ) Failure to arrange occupational health check-ups for workers;
- 6 ) No provision of Chinese language instructions for chemical materials processed in electrolyte and damp pulp workshops.”

Again, back in 2002, two years before the workers fought to make their cases heard, both the Sanitation Supervision Bureau in Shenzhen and the top management level of JetPower were aware that production operations were not safe! Again, the authorities failed to inform workers of the occupational hazards they faced and failed to make the factory improve the situation.

Yet compared to Power Pack and Shenzhen JetPower, the situation in Advance Battery was even worse. The Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention had taken samples of the concentration of cadmium oxide particles in the



air at Advance Battery on January 8, 2004, soon after the cadmium poisoning came to light, and issued a “Sanitation Evaluation Report”. The results revealed that six work sites among the seven tested had illegally high concentrations of cadmium oxide. At one site levels were 35.5 times higher than the legal regulation! Meanwhile, the noise pollution was over the legal standards as well, with 16 among 18 work sites violating legal regulation.

Even after Power Pack had stopped production of nickel cadmium batteries, tests of the concentration of cadmium oxide particles in the factory’s air, taken by the Huizhou Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in May 21, 2004, showed that the concentration of cadmium oxide at two work sites was 1.1 times over the legal standard. The inspection also disclosed that two other work sites violated noise pollution standards. Later an inspection on November 25 showed that the cadmium oxide concentration was within legal standards, although the noise level exceeded the permissible limit.

Recognizing that the scandal was too big to be covered up Gold Peak’s boss Victor Lo finally admitted to a newspaper on September 22, 2004 that “management’s negligence, due to intense pressure to speed up production in the Pearl River Delta, was the major cause of cadmium poisoning”. He qualified this remark by saying that: “among 17 factories owned by Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd., only Power Pack and Advance Battery have suffered these problems”<sup>13</sup> However, Victor Lo had left out Shenzhen JetPower. Back in early September, the workers at the JetPower factory were found to have excessive cadmium levels although the results were not made public until October. We have no idea whether Victor Lo was simply too busy to learn of the case or whether his subordinates simply dared not tell him the truth. Nevertheless, as the Mother Company of the Huizhou plants, the Gold Peak Industrial (Holding) Ltd. should be responsible for the misbehaviours of its subsidiaries.

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13 *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, September 22, 2004.

**Appendix:**

The Discrepancy between Two Urine Tests of Women Workers  
in Power Pack and Advance Battery in 2004

Unit:  $\mu\text{mol}/\text{mol Cr}$

proceeding code	factory	The date and result of the first urinate test	The date and result of the second urinate test	Time Lag (day)	Difference between two tests (times)	Notes
XYC	Advance Battery	15 July 2004	5 August 2004	20	9.75	Excess level in the first test, without chance of re- checking
		15.6	1.6			
RZC	Advance Battery	15 July 2004	9 August 2004	24	8.4	Excess level in the first test, without chance of re- checking
		21.8	2.6			
FST	Advance Battery	27 August 2004	13 October 2004	47	16.2	Excess level in both tests, but allegedly the factory only accepted one of them. On 30 January 2007, her self-paid test in Guangdong Hospital showed the excessive level cadmium again. She is now suing the factory.
HQX	Advance Battery	15 July 2004	5 August 2004	20	2	Placed under observation.
		13.5	25.8			

proceeding code	factory	The date and result of the first urinate test	The date and result of the second urinate test	Time Lag (day)	Difference between two tests (times)	Notes
YHG	Power Pack	21/7/04	1 July 2004	10	85.5	Placed under observation, Children with excessive level
		248	2.9			
HYY	Power Pack	21 June 2004	1 July 2004	10	182.5	Placed under observation
		292	1.6			
YCX	Power Pack	13 September 2004	22 September 2004	9	16	cough, blood in urine, the factory refused to arrange her for check-up
		5.9	0.37			
HLY	Power Pack	11 August 2004	13 September 2004	33	6.6	Excess level in the first test, without chance of re- checking
		1.8	11.9			
RGG	Power Pack	23 September 2004	26 October 2004	33	4.5	Excess level in the first test, without chance of re- checking
		11.6	2.6			
YL	Advance Battery	18 August	16 September 2004	28	29.5	Placed under observation
		274.4	9.3			

## Chapter Four

# One Day *in the* Sweatshop

It was commonly believed in the 1990s that the “information revolution” was causing capitalism to increasingly free itself from material production, as the world became ever more networked and ever more “virtual.” Along with material production, it was said that the working class, was becoming increasingly irrelevant. One visit to the sweatshops on the Chinese mainland, however, reveals the other side of this story. The problem with the above idea is that it only considers the advanced Western countries, and in fact only certain aspects of those countries. It forgets that the “networked world” is itself built on vast amounts of hardware, and that even in the advanced countries there are still tens of millions of production workers. It even more forgets that capitalism is a global system, and that within this system the twenty-first century networked world stands along side and relies on a world of nineteenth-century-style sweatshops. The fact that it is difficult to see this reality is no coincidence: the real producers in the factories—the workers—are made voiceless and forced to become the real “silent majority,” while those with “discursive power” are the bosses and big officials riding on the workers’ backs, who can whitewash the inhumane factory system at their own pleasure. Only after workers’ actions such as strikes or roadblocks is it possible for us to see the bitterness created by such “modern” advancements as “scientific management” and “human resource management.” Until the cadmium poisoning case was revealed, no one doubted the high-sounding words in Gold Peak’s annual company reports from Victor Lo, the company chairman: “[W]e regard the workforce as our most valuable asset. We strive to create an ideal working environment to make employees feel fully valued and appreciated, and enhance their sense of being part of the group.”

This chapter relates workers’ experiences in the Power Pack and Advance Bat-

tery factories, and lets the workers express their own attitudes and feelings about life in the factories. One section was written by a female worker herself, and another is compiled from interviews with two workers, one from each factory. From these two sections, we can feel some of their pains and joys, and see their actual and “spiritual” rebellions against the inhumane conditions they face in the factories. But before turning to the workers’ own narratives we will first give a brief introduction to the working conditions in the two factories, including some facts concerning breaches of the labor law.

### **Knowing Violations**

A GP worker recalled how he was recruited:

*Before 2004 (that is, before the cadmium poisoning incident was exposed), we didn't even get to see a contract. We just signed our names on a big piece of paper that had the names of many other workers. Workers didn't get to ask about the contents of the contract, and we didn't get a copy, either. If a worker asked to see the contract, the bosses would say 'They're all the same, you don't need to see it.'*

Although workers in the mainland are granted substantial protections under the labor law, it is common knowledge that the law is rarely enforced, and so Power Pack and Advance Battery are not exceptions.

According to the labor law, workers should not work more than 40 hours a week, and should not work more than 36 hours of overtime per week.<sup>1</sup> The workers from Power Pack informed us that this was never the case at the factory:

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1 Article 38 of the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China stated: “The employer shall guarantee that its laborers have at least one day off a week.” Article 41 stated: “The employer can prolong work hours due to needs of production or businesses after consultation with its trade union and laborers. The work hours to be prolonged, in general, shall be no longer than one hour a day, or no more than three hours a day if such prolonging is called for due to special reasons and under the condition that the physical health of laborers is guaranteed. The work time to be prolonged shall not exceed, however, 36 hours a month.” <http://www.lawinfochina.com/law/display.asp?id=705>

*We work in two shifts. The morning-shift works from 7am until 8pm, without any breaks for water or to go to the bathroom except for the noon to 1 pm break for lunch. In the evening they don't allow any time for workers to eat, so workers can't eat dinner until 8pm when they get off duty. It's even worse for the night-shift workers, who have to work from 8pm to 6:45am the following morning, with only 30 minutes for a 'midnight snack.'*

Subtracting meal times, day shift workers are forced to work for 12 hours a day and night shift workers almost as much. On top of this grueling schedule, workers are only given a single one-day break per month. Thus, day-shift workers work 84 hours a week and night-shift workers 77 hours per week. This means that, like workers in most factories in the mainland, Power Pack workers are illegally forced to work overtime.

Although workers are paid hourly wages, they are required to complete daily output assignments.

*They assign output quotas in such a way that only high-efficiency workers can handle it, so less efficient workers don't have any time to rest at all."*

*The quota is so high that we don't even have time to go to the bathroom, let alone wash our hands after work.*

*Those who do not finish the daily quota are forced to continue working without pay after punching out.*

*If you don't finish your quota, they deduct your overtime pay. If you don't finish [your morning quota] before noon, you're forced to finish it during the lunch hour [without pay].*

In order to finish their quotas on time, some workers take their lunch into the workshop, and eat and drink without leaving their stations. Night-shift workers

also take their meals into the workshop. The Advance Battery factory works in the same way. Some workers told us that this particular violation had potentially devastating consequences for the workers:

*The crazy thing is that taking food into the workshop is probably one of the reasons why workers are getting poisoned--but it's not only not prohibited by the factory, the managers actually encourage it because it's the only way night shift workers can finish their quotas.<sup>2</sup>*

As for wages, one veteran worker told us that workers' wages plus additional benefits (such as insurance) in Power Pack were higher than in other factories. In 2004, the monthly wages of a normal worker were over 1000 yuan. Take workers in the milling shop with excessive cadmium levels as an example. They generally have more than four or five years of work experience, most between four and eight years, and have monthly wages from 1200 to 1500 yuan (because of the dusty conditions in the milling shop, they are paid slightly higher wages than others as compensation). The higher wages they received meant that, before September 2004, many workers never considered quitting their jobs and leaving the factory. Some of the women workers in the hospital even told reporters that they were willing to return to the factories to work in order to support their families.

High wages, however, uniformly result from overtime work because base wages are not high, and in fact workers in the two factories were paid less than the minimum legal wage for an extended period. In 2004, the minimum legal wage in Huizhou was 400 yuan per month, but workers at Power Pack were paid a base wage of 380 yuan per month, an obvious violation of the law. Generally, overtime pay is almost two to three times higher than the base wage. By having workers dependent on overtime work to earn a decent wage, employers are able

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2 Presentation by workers from Huizhou ABT. See also Xia Xianhu, "Chongqing Migrant Workers Afflicted with Cadmium Poisoning in Guangdong: 65 Victims Sue Today." *Chongqing Chenbao*, Oct. 14, 2004.

to strengthen their power over the workers: those who do not follow orders are not allowed to work overtime.

The factories are all exceedingly calculating with respect to workers' wages. A typical example is that in 2003, in order to reduce the extra wages given to long-term workers, many workers with more than ten years of service at the two factories were simply dismissed. Furthermore, factories used to increase every worker's daily wage by 50 to 80 cents once a year, but over a period of a few years the number of workers receiving wages was sharply reduced: first only half of the workers on a given production line received wage increases, then only 30 percent of the workers, then 20 percent, 10 percent, and finally only 5 percent of the workers were granted wage increases. That is to say that on a production line with fifty workers, the number of workers who would get wage increases was reduced to three. Only "excellent workers" are given increases, such as those who had not asked for leave for the whole year. Power Pack and Advance Battery are the same in this regard. Workers told us that of course, those with a good relationship with their line supervisors are granted pay raises first, while "talkative" workers, namely those who complain about conditions in the factories, are disliked by the management and never get pay rises.<sup>3</sup> It was said among the workers that in Advance Battery the wages of workers in the most difficult and dirty positions could be increased, while in Power Pack usually only the supervisor's relatives could get wage increases. Complaints over nepotism in Power Pack played an important role in the subsequent strikes. Furthermore, for the past several years, continuing even after the cadmium poisoning issue was exposed, every time basic wages were increased, workers' subsidies, allowances and bonuses were reduced at the same time. As a result, workers' income was almost unchanged and sometimes reduced. This practice was common in other factories as well. It is not difficult to understand why it was not only the occupational health and safety concerns that compelled workers to strike, and why other issues such as wages played a role as well.

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3 Some workers pointed out that it was often the "talkative" workers who were able to spur other workers into action later on.



Although the situations in Power Pack and Advance Battery that we describe above show that their workers are severely exploited, they are by no means the worst cases in mainland China. On the contrary, workers told us that “wages in the factory are relatively high for the area” and “among the top two” in Huizhou. As for national holidays, workers in Power Pack are granted leave, but workers in many other factories have no vacation time for the whole year. Overtime pay at Power Pack was 150% to 200% of the base wage (before 2000, overtime pay for Saturday was 150% of the base wage), but there are many factories that do not pay overtime at all, a clear violation of the labor law. In spite of the fact that workers in Power Pack suffered severe cadmium poisoning due to years of inadequate protections, compared with many other battery factories in the mainland, including large-scale manufacturers, the safety standards in Power Pack were not at all the worst.

### **Dormitories, Unions and Local Governments**

The workers' dormitory at Power Pack is within the factory complex, directly alongside the factory building itself, with the two buildings only a few meters apart. Workers often take their meals back to the dormitory to eat, and can hear the machines whirring nearby as they eat.

The dormitory has five floors, and each floor has eleven rooms. Each room has six bunk beds and normally houses seven or eight workers. There is only one stairwell in the entire building. The showers are in the rear of the building, with around ten shower stalls, though several are usually broken. There are too few showers, and so in the winter when workers need hot water to wash, there is always a long line and some of the workers are forced to wait hours for their turn.

The dormitory houses both the day and night shift workers. When the day shift workers are on their break, there is often enough commotion to disturb the night shift workers. If the night shift workers return early, they will likewise disturb their sleeping coworkers. Each room has two small fans. When the weather is hot the small fans are not enough to cool the large rooms, and the heat be-

comes very uncomfortable. This is especially true of the fifth floor, when during the hot and humid summers many workers choose to lay down mats and sleep on the cement floor. The workers all feel that the dormitory is too noisy, dirty, uncomfortable, and filled with mosquitoes, and they are not able to rest well. Thus many of the workers have managed to find rooms outside of the factory - some of the workers have partners in Huizhou with whom they live in outside apartments, and sometimes several workers from the same village pool their money and rent a room outside together. Workers are charged 45 yuan per month to live in the dormitory, and many choose to live outside the factory to avoid this fee.

There are labor unions in Power Pack and Advance Battery, but as is the case with so-called labor unions in other enterprises in China, they exist as pure formalities set up to satisfy the legal requirement. The chairman of the labor union in Power Pack is none other than the Human Affairs manager of the factory, Chen Jianfen. Who are the members? If you ask workers in Power Pack whether or not they know if there is a union at the factory, most would answer, "No." If the workers do not even know that the union exists, then the union is utterly useless. Actual membership in the so-called union is chosen by the management among line supervisors. "Members" have 0.5% of their wages deducted as union dues, which is used for parties or other activities once or twice a year.

Similarly, in accordance with the law, each factory is equipped with a so-called 'Production Safety Committee'. As with the labor unions, however, they are purely empty organizations which have no practical impact on the actual conditions under which workers work.

While local governments turn a blind eye to factories' failure to comply with labor, safety and other laws, they do often directly involve themselves in factory life, but nearly always in ways favorable to the companies and to the detriment of the workers. Some typical examples concern enforcement of the family planning policy and residence permits. In the mainland, every "work unit," in-

cluding private enterprises, is required to take responsibility for implementing certain programs assigned to them by the government. Family planning is one such program. Since it opened, the Power Pack factory has implemented the family planning policy, under which women are not allowed to have more than one child.

**Cao Menghua recalled:**

*Women who have a second pregnancy are given administrative sanctions: workers are not allowed to work, and line supervisors are demoted to normal workers. The majority of workers feel that this is reasonable, because they feel that there is no reason why one should have a second child when the state forbids it.*

Liang Qing is a knowledgeable and capable worker who had a second child while at the factory. Her superiors demoted her and sent her to work in the milling shop for this, but it was generally believed by fellow workers that her demotion was also a result of her being too “lax” in the factory—i.e., not deferential enough to her superiors. After Liang Qing gave the results of her cadmium test to the factory, the managers told her that her results were unimportant, saying that only the “most lax” workers would take that test, and then ignored her. Liang Qing was worried about pressing the issue, as she now had a second baby to care for and her husband was a mechanic at TCL [which also had a close relationship to Gold Peak].

In order to better “manage” the workers, the local government offices of the areas in which the factories reside - i.e., the village committee, sub-district offices or occasionally the higher level district governments - send public order teams to the factories to check residence permits and family planning documents of the workers on a regular basis. These “inspections” have more or less become money making operations for the local officials and public order teams, as they find all manner of excuses to fine the workers. In the Mao era, public order teams were supposed to be local autonomous organizations established for self-protection, and members were to be selected from among the workers themselves

to carry out patrols after working hours. As such, they thus were not to have legal enforcement powers. At least since the 1980s, however, local governments have directly hired people to staff the public order teams and turned them into "professional" organizations with legal enforcement powers, in spite of having no legal or constitutional authority to do so, because they are not regular public employees at all. In fact, the members are basically contract workers largely hired from local idlers or even thugs. The overall quality of these ragtag teams is of course very low. It was just such a public order team that was responsible for the famous beating to death of the student Sun Zhigang in Guangdong in 2003 for not carrying his proper residence permit. This case was not merely an isolated incident, for public order teams frequently abuse their authority enough to cause public outcries. When this happens the local Public Security Bureau tends to shift the blame to the individual team members rather than seeing the problem as a product of the very institution of the "public order team" itself.

To a certain extent one may argue that the public order team as it is now is a by-product of the household registration system, which although relaxed a bit recently still denies permanent city residency rights to people from rural households. The latter are second class citizens whose children do not even enjoy the same right to education as regular city dwellers are entitled to. In order to enforce the institutional discrimination against rural migrants the municipal governments have found it necessary to encourage sub-district governments to reinforce and expand the power of the public order teams. The public order teams and the household registration system compose a powerful instrument to control rural migrant workers.

Cao Menghua told us of how the local government, with the help of its public order teams, colluded with the factory management and harassed workers:

*In the year 2000, the Family Planning Office of Xiaojinkou township government came in a van to the factory to catch people. Every pregnant worker had to present her pregnancy permission card, and those without cards were taken to the township office and fined 2000 yuan in 2004. After the workers began protesting over the cad-*

*mium issue, the Family Planning office came to fine people again. This was clearly done to try to intimidate the workers.*

*In addition, the village also sent a public order team to check everyone's temporary residence permits. Everyone who did not have a permit or whose permit had expired was fined. They waited until it was time to get off work and then blocked the door of the factory to catch the workers as they tried to leave.*

*The permits are all handled through the factory. Every worker gives his or her pregnancy permission card and residence permit to the factory, and the factory gives it to the township government to get stamped. If the permit is not accepted (because it has expired or has not gone through the yearly renewal), he or she is fined 100 yuan.*

*After the cadmium poisoning was reported, officials from the village committee came to the factory and took pictures at the factory gate. They inspected the waste water processing system, which was temporarily turned on for the inspection. It was then declared to everyone in the village that they need not worry, because the waste water is processed before it leaves the factory.*

## **A Day in Power Pack**

**Li Xiaoyu**

(A former assembly line worker at Power Pack)

### **A ) The morning alarm rings ... ..**

“The bloody bell again... ..” I muttered with my head ruffled up in the quilt. Since starting at Power Pack, sleeping had become my only hobby, and every break became the right time for me to doze. I heard my roommates running back and forth, Chun screaming out, “Who’s seen my uniform?” Feng demanding, “Would you give me back my basin?” Everyone was yelling, accusing, demanding. After a while, when it became quiet, I pulled the quilt away and took a deep breath. My bed curtain was still closed. I stretched and let out a groan.

Then the voice of one of my roommates came crashing down, "You're still in bed?! There are only ten minutes left! You're just asking for trouble!" She had come back for her factory ID and found me still in bed, so she shouted at me to wake me up.

I looked at the clock and was surprised to find that there really were only ten minutes left. I quickly combed my hair with my hands (after starting at Power Pack I cut my lovely long hair so that I could sleep a few extra minutes in the morning), wiped my face with a towel and sprinted to the workshop with my uniform in one hand and a bag in the other. The bag was filled with oversleeves and washed gloves (the factory wanted to pass the ISO14000 environmental standards certification, and in order to save resources and make the most of our materials, we were given one pair of gloves every two days instead of the required one pair per day; we had no choice but to take them to dormitory and wash them ourselves).

### **B ) In the workshop... ..**

The bell to start work rang just as I got to my seat. I wiped the sweat off my forehead and noticed the other workers around me already working at their stations - in order to finish their quotas and avoid compulsory overtime, they had come to work early. I really felt sorry for them, and realized how lucky I was.

Compulsory overtime means overtime work without pay. The factory figures that it pays workers by the hour, or more concretely it pays for the amount of products that the workers can produce during working hours, including the time for eating, drinking and going to the bathroom. So in order to increase productivity, the factory reduces the amount of time workers can eat, drink, and go to the bathroom, and sets the amount of products a worker must produce every hour in order to meet the production quota for the day. One of the managers had a saying about productivity: "Productivity can be increased without limit. There

is no so-called productivity ceiling or standard for productivity. The higher the pressure the stronger the drive, and thus the higher the productivity.” Therefore in the assembly department the most important thing is to increase productivity, and if a worker doesn’t increase the amount of products she produces, then she has to continue working after punching out to finish her quota. Of course workers don’t want to punch out if they have to keep working, so the line supervisors take their cards and punches out for them while keeping the worker at her station to keep working.

Some people might wonder if that ever happened to me. It never did. One reason is that I was in charge of turning on the machines,<sup>4</sup> so if I was angry enough I could cause a slowdown or purposely damage a machine, and fixing it would take an hour or two, during which time the whole production line wouldn’t have any materials. Another reason is that all of the machine operators stick together and no one is willing to work overtime, and we synchronize things so well that there aren’t any opportunities for the managers to take advantage. Even so we were still forced to work overtime twice, but we were still in much better shape than the other workers.

But enough of all that, let’s get back to my story. Just after I put on the face mask given to me by the line supervisor, I saw that my workmate sitting across from me was crying. I was shocked and asked her what was wrong, but she just kept crying and didn’t say a word. Then a workmate nearby told me what had happened.

After SARS broke out in 2003, we were each allocated two 3M masks per week by the line supervisor. When this workmate got her mask, she found it was a little too tight and tried to loosen it, but the tie broke. She asked the line supervisor to trade it for another one, but the line supervisor said, “I don’t have

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4 “Turning on the machines” means running the machines themselves rather than cleaning up or processing by hand the semi-finished products produced by the machines. It requires some technique, and gives the worker in charge of it some measure of control over the operation.

any extras. Go ask the general line supervisor for another one." The general line supervisor was a well-known grouch, so the workmate was afraid to ask for a new mask. Later, the general line supervisor passed by, saw that she had not started her machine and asked why. When the workmate said that the tie to her mask was broken, the general line supervisor yelled at her, "How could you be so careless! Do you realize that these masks cost money? And you think you can just waste them!" The workmate then started crying. I felt bad for her, went over to wipe off her tears, and said, "Don't cry over this. If you cry, people will look down on you. Let me see if I can take care of it for you." I went over to the general line supervisor and said, "Ling, would you do me a favor and exchange this for a new one?" The general line supervisor looked at me and said with a sigh, "Look, I can't do anything about it. You know the higher managers are stingy with the masks - the line supervisors get one mask every four days." I said, "Well, you shouldn't be so harsh. We're all migrant workers here. You don't have to act so severely." Later, the general line supervisor went to console the workmate for a while. As for the mask, I came up with a solution - we made a hole in the edge of the mask and strung it together with a piece of elastic. That pretty much solved that issue.

Telling that story always makes me feel bad - is it that looking back on that time touches a raw nerve?

I shouldn't complain too much. Once when I was daydreaming at work (at work I always used to think about all sorts of questions or about books I'd read - my feeling was that I only had to sell my body to the factory, but my thoughts were my own!), suddenly a workmate nearby shouted out "I'm done! I'm done!" I gave her a skeptical glance, and she quickly responded, "It's time - I've got to go." It was the time for her to nurse her baby. Many female workers got married while working at the factory and continued working when pregnant. After a short leave to give birth, many women came back to the factory with their babies and continued working. Every day at set times a family member would bring the baby to the factory gate and the worker would go down to nurse it.



Each time this would take about half an hour, and each day this would add up to about an hour. The production quota for that hour would not be reduced, so the mothers usually had to work during lunch time to finish their assignments.

A year later I found out that cadmium can be transferred from mother to baby through nursing. I then found out that some of the children had gone to the hospital to be tested, and the urine analysis showed that they had unsafe concentrations of cadmium. Please forgive me for being so sentimental, but I feel so bad for the mothers and the innocent little babies.

The morning was very busy and we all felt rushed, and finally the long-awaited bell rang. I temporarily took back my body—all of us were renting out our bodies to the capitalists in exchange for a tiny amount of cash. Here's a funny story: one of my classmates started at this factory just after graduating from school. Although she had left the school, her brain was still stuck in school time. When the bell rang she'd say out loud, "Ah, school's out." Everyone would laugh and she'd look around wondering what was so funny.

### C ) **Mealtimes... ..**

Let's talk about the meals. We stood in line to get food and were normally very orderly, though inevitably there were occasional problems. The food was so-so, like the cheap food in all of the factories. Then everybody sat at a table with workmates they knew from the same hometown and joked, gossiped, and talked about their problems while eating. We kept our work uniforms on even though we weren't on duty, and at that time had no idea that cadmium powder was stuck to our clothes and falling into our food.

After a little rest at lunchtime, we resumed renting out our bodies in the afternoon. It was pretty much the same story as the morning, and every day was the same. Let me quote the words of one of the line supervisors: "Everyone has a job to do, and we're all in the same boat... .." It was true that every day we were in the same boat. Every day we worked and worked, and who knew how far we

had gone. The difference was that all the line supervisor cared about was our output, but we just wanted to get paid.

#### D ) **After work ... ..**

At 8:00pm we left the workshop exhausted. "Off duty," what a beautiful phrase. It meant that we could put everything aside and do what we wanted to do. First, however, we had to take care of our bodies, and that meant getting some food. They only gave us half an hour to eat dinner, and if you weren't quick enough to be at the front of the queue there would be no good food left. I decided it was better to eat at an outside restaurant. Although it was more expensive, I didn't have to worry about my place in line. While I could have dinner outside, showering was more trouble. There were more than a thousand female workers but only ten shower stalls. Quarreling was unavoidable. In order to avoid getting into quarrels, I usually waited until almost 9:30pm before going down to shower. The hot water was turned off at 9:30, so I was the last one almost every time. What did I do before going to shower? I usually napped in bed while waiting for my friend to call me to go to the shower room together.

After showering, those of us who liked to read would read in bed. Others liked to go out, and would hang out at the North Railway Station Square with friends. Some just went to walk in the park with their boyfriends. There used to always be a lot of people around the factory gate. After the cadmium scandal broke out, there weren't so many people around the factory gate anymore. Why? One person said that before the cadmium scandal girls working at Power Pack were very popular. When they were off work, there would be people on bicycles, motorcycles, and in cars waiting for them. Afterwards, when it was known that many of those beautiful girls were poisoned, they weren't as welcome as before. Although that's a slight exaggeration, many girls were rejected by their boyfriends after it was found out that they had cadmium poisoning. There were more fights between couples. When the girls went back home it was very difficult for them to find husbands. That's really what happened. I was one of the victims.

## **My Days at the Advance Battery Factory**

Jiang Xiaomei

In May 1990, I got a job at the factory. Later I was switched to the assembly department as line supervisor. I did everything and had managed four lines.

My job was in wrapping and packing. Only after I had worked there for five or six years did the factory begin allocating masks. Many of the workers were fifteen or sixteen year olds who came from far away. At the beginning the wage was 4.9 yuan per day, and it increased by a little every year, from 5.2 to 5.8 yuan, then to 6.2 yuan. There were three or four days off every month. Compared with now, it was a much smaller operation at that time, with just two production lines on the factory floor. In 1993 another two production lines were set up with fifty people on each line.

In the beginning everyone's work shifts was fixed, either the day shift or the night shift. The migrant workers all wanted to work on the night shift, because those jobs paid 6 yuan more per day. Later, workers rotated between day shift and night shift.

### **XXX is an Evil Bitch!**

#### **-----Disputes between workers and the employers in the workshop**

In 1990, workers in the wrapping and packing department struck two or three times - they were given too much work and they refused to do it. The factory director himself came down and asked them to return to work. Most of the workers came from Sichuan and Hunan. At that time, they had not adapted to the job there, and were impatient.

In early 2000, workers in plates-weighing workshop caused some commotion because while workers in the milling shop were paid an extra 5 yuan per day in compensation because the dust made the work very unpleasant, the plates-weighing group was given no extra pay in spite of the fact that they

thought that their work was no cleaner than that in milling shop. They asked for at least 2 yuan in compensation pay, and said that according to the law the factory should pay double wages on Saturday because it counted as overtime. All the workers on the day shift made a list of requests and gave it to the factory. Ye Guangtian asked the workers to withdraw the requests. Some of the workers got scared and backed down. Those who didn't back down, including electricians in the engineering department, were fired. One worker I know backed down because he still wanted to work there and he thought that his job wasn't so dirty. Workers on the night shift drafted a list of requests, too, but didn't sign it, so none of them were fired.

You could say that the assembly workshops on the third floor were dirtier than the milling shop, with more dust. There weren't many workers in the milling shop. They were relatively free, the foreman was nice to them, the quota was flexible enough that sometimes they could finish two hours early. None of them wanted to work on the third floor.

After the cadmium poisoning issue came to light, these workers gradually lost their willingness to work there.

The wall of the bathroom stall in the workshop used to be as high as a person. Then, the factory director, Xie Qijiang, said that some workers were reading books and slacking off in the bathroom, and that some were throwing defects (beyond the allowed rate in the factory) into the toilet and blocking it up. So they removed the bathroom stall door and the wall was cut to half of its original height. After they did that, how could anyone feel comfortable using the bathroom?

After the cadmium incident they renovated the workshop and fixed it up as if it were a hotel. After we got back from the hospital and went to the factory to attend our meeting with the government officials, we joked with each other that we should go and enjoy the hotel bathroom....

In 1995, the factory produced nickel-metal hydride batteries. Before that time it made both nickel-metal hydride batteries and nickel-cadmium batteries. Later, they built the Power Pack factory to produce nickel-cadmium batteries, so we just produced nickel-metal hydride batteries. In 2002, we went back to the same way as before. Someone from the top management said that the productivity was high in Power Pack and low in Advance Battery. The reason for this was that we at Advance Battery emphasized quality, and the management at Advance Battery tended to give Power Pack easier jobs. We often sent supervisors to teach them as well. If the top management compared the two factories side by side without taking all of this into account, we would come out looking worse. The waste rate in Power Pack was high, and the waste there was piled up and not recorded on the report forms. Our supervisor always said that workers in Power Pack did better and asked us why that was the case. When we went to Power Pack, we asked the workers and line supervisors. They told us that their waste material was poured out by the basin.

In April 2002, Xue Peiqiong was appointed to be workshop director. She wore five masks when coming to the workshop, which was really going too far. A year later she was hospitalized with hepatitis. She said it was very poisonous in the factory, and soon left.

Xue Peiqiong used to constantly measure workers' every movement in order to standardize and increase efficiency. She would come in the morning and stand behind with a stopwatch so she could count your output and see how much you could finish in a minute. Think about it - someone who has just been at work for an hour or two is going to be well rested and full of energy, but the longer you work the more tired you get. Also, if someone is in a good mood one week they're clearly going to do their job better, and when they're in a bad mood that will affect their work, too. But you're always given the same quota every day. No one can always work at the same level for 365 days, can they? She didn't take this into account.

I told the supervisor, Xu Wanjie, what was going on. I told her over and over that the output quotas were too high. It was no use though, and he said that I always took the workers' side.

One day Xue Peiqiong put up a board with the names of the lowest output and highest output workers. Within two or three days, output took off. Of course, no one wanted to have her name on the "lowest output" board. The worker with the highest output would be awarded 100 yuan, while the one with the lowest output would be fined. Who wouldn't want 100 extra yuan? The factory didn't pay any additional money, but just deducted money from some workers and gave it to others and got the output increased. Workers on some of the production lines reached an agreement: no one would produce more than anyone else, but instead everyone would produce the same amount. You would finish 8,000 pieces and I would do exactly the same amount.

In fact, the board was made by Xue Peiqiong's predecessor Director Wang, but he never put it up. Although output increased, quality dropped a lot. When we got off work we had to write so much on the waste report that our hands hurt.

There was also a performance prize. According to the regulations, those in clean jobs shouldn't have been awarded more than 50 yuan, and those on dirty positions not more than 60 yuan, but I would give them more than that every time. Xu Wanjie wasn't happy about that, as she thought I was favoring the workers again.

I took my job as line supervisor very seriously. The line supervisor has to write up report forms, train workers, as well as many other things. Once at a workers' meeting I was asked to go up on the stage and speak, and I was so nervous that I trembled. Every time someone came to inspect the factory we had to change the figures on our reports, otherwise the factory wouldn't pass the inspection. I had to take home a big stack of report forms to change, and

they didn't give me any overtime pay for that. Some line supervisors were very smart in that they gave the report forms to workers to change. Our production line did everything from the wrapping and packing to the pressing. Except for the position making caps, all of the other jobs on the line were very dirty. There were hardly any veteran workers who wanted to work in this production line, because they thought it was too dirty and it was hard to breathe. The married workers didn't mind so much, but the younger girls couldn't take it and usually only worked for a little while before leaving. I was busy training new people all the time. I was stupid because whenever the workers couldn't do something I would go over and do it myself.

The output quotas were too high, and it was very stressful. The line supervisors were very strict with workers. When using the bathroom, workers would write things on the wall like "So-and-so is an evil bitch". Sometimes it was really harsh. The line supervisors sometimes joked with each other, saying, "Did you show up in the paper today?" which meant "Did anyone write nasty things on the bathroom wall about you?" Some time later one of the line supervisors saw that someone had written some nasty things about her and she got very angry. She made all of the workers in her production line write something on a piece of paper so that she could test their handwriting, but she didn't find out who wrote the nasty words about her. After that, there was no more writing on the bathroom wall.

In future if we work in factories, we want to serve as workers, and not line supervisors. Of course, it's not easy for people our age to find a good job.

### **The Office staff looked down on the workers**

In the past, the factory could hire workers easily. Especially after the Spring Festival, sometimes more than a thousand people came to apply for work and the whole yard would be full of applicants. Some of them were brought in by the office managers or customs officials. Some of the people brought in this way were incompetent, but we couldn't do anything about it because of their

high connections in the factory.

The human affairs department is responsible for recruiting new workers. Some people in that department would ask for an "recommendation fee" from the job applicants. There was a girl on my production line who was not able to do the work regardless of how I taught her. I told her that this kind of job was not suitable for her. She pleaded with me, and said that if she lost the job she would lose the "recommendation fee"<sup>5</sup> she paid to get the job in the first place. She had given 800 yuan to someone in the human affairs department. I stormed over to the office and told the human affairs staff that whoever took the 800 yuan from the girl should give the money back, because it wasn't easy for a worker to earn 800 yuan.<sup>6</sup>

The office staff looked down on the workers in the factory and always tried to order us around. I was very familiar with the people in the human affairs department, so I wasn't afraid to speak to them like that. Two days later, the girl thanked me and told me that her introduction fee was returned to her.

At the end of 2003, Xu Wanjie said that the Labor Law had changed and workers with more than ten years of experience could be fired without any compensation. More than fifty people were fired by the factory, including people from engineering department, those that didn't perform well, and some who had a lot of experience. About six or seven people in the engineering department were fired, all of whom had served the factory for eight or nine years. All of those people were in their 40s, and it was going to be very difficult for them to find new jobs. One worker started trembling after being fired. He had been afraid of being fired from the beginning. His family was poor, and he was trying to earn money to build a new house (in his home village) and support

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5 It is the literal translation of "jieshaofei", in fact a bribe. The practice to pay bribe in order to get a job is very common in Guangdong factories.

6 Workers told us that during the strike period, new workers for the production lines on the third floor did also paid introduction fees of 1,000 yuan, and in the end because of the strike new workers left the factory before they had even worked two months. Their introduction fees were never repaid.



his kids. His wife dominated him, and she would bite his head off when she found out what happened. His pay was not high and close to mine. For a man, that was not a high wage. He was really afraid the whole time, and it turned out that he was made into a victim in the end.

At that time the Desay and TCL factories did the same thing as ours: workers with more than ten years of work experience were just fired. Those employees asked for compensation, and I heard that they won finally.

The factory director changed frequently. The higher-ups were afraid that if a person served as factory director for too long, he would start develop close relations with the employees and when he resigns he'd take the employees with him and leave (for other factory). The last factory director was a former product manager, and this happened to him after he'd been factory director for only a year. I guess he counted as unlucky.

At the end of 2003, the Gold Peak Group took over the Modern Battery [*Xinshidai* or “New Era” in Chinese - ed.] factory. In early 2004 when we went to that factory to arrange a celebration, we sang “Entering a New Era.” Before long, the Advance Battery was closed.

## Chapter Five

*Distance Learning:*

# The Trek to Beijing

Li Xiaoyu

After the 63 in-patient women Power Pack workers with excessive cadmium levels were forced to leave the hospital on July 9, they began negotiations with the factory.

### **Organize to negotiate**

Cheng Xiang recalled how the workers organized themselves in order to get a better deal:

*After we 63 workers left the hospital, the factory required us to resume work after a three day rest. In addition to worrying about the health problems we had already contracted, we were all still concerned about the hazardous conditions in the factory. So 40 of us had a meeting on the big lawn adjacent to the Huizhou Railway Station and decided to negotiate with the factory. Liu Youping was our leader before, but because of this the factory refused to extend his contract. Since he didn't have excessive cadmium he had to leave. Without a leader we were in danger of simply melting away, but Liu was really a devoted workers' representative, and he identified those who were committed and trained them to be workers' representatives. On July 27 we held a meeting to elect representatives. At that time we discovered that some of us were being followed, and to deal with that we came up with the solution of electing multiple delegates: two chief delegates and six deputy delegates. The chief delegates*

*would liaise with the six deputy delegates, and each of them would be accountable to nine workers. On top of electing delegates we also raised funds to finance our operations.*

While they were voting on representatives, one of the workers joked that they were organizing a trade union. Due to the government's complete suppression of independent trade unions, the workers in fact had little clear idea of what a trade union was, so this could only be a joke. Electing representatives and having regular meetings was the farthest the workers could go. These 63 workers acted together and entered the factory every day, not to work, but to gather in the meeting room to discuss how to negotiate with the factory. The factory had no choice but to isolate them from the workers in workshops. The afflicted workers demanded proper diagnosis, treatment and compensation, but were refused.

The workers soon found that they were not only fighting against the factory, but it was the government officials of Huizhou who were in fact their main adversary. Behind the "invisible hand" of the labor market there was a visible fist as well. The Huizhou Municipal government founded a "task force" called the Huizhou Municipal Leading Group for Handling the Incidents of Workers' Excessive Cadmium Levels, which was composed of officials from different departments, and sent it directly to help the factory. Cheng Xiang recalled:

*The government task force was composed of officials from the Labor Bureau, the Foreign Economics and Trade Bureau, the Bureau for Letters and Calls, the Sanitation Supervision Bureau, the Trade Union, etc. Every day, three to four people from the task force were appointed to negotiate with us. Our representatives did sometimes meet with the management, but most often we had to deal with the government task force.*

One of the members of the task force was Secretary Ye from the Foreign Economics and Trade Bureau. At one time when a worker spoke angrily during the

negotiations, Secretary Ye shouted back furiously: "Are you intentionally making trouble? If so we will call the police to arrest you all!"

**Li Xiaoyu recalled:**

*On July 24 an officer Ms. Liu from the Sanitation Bureau spoke with us. Towards the end she said: "Your lives are more lowly than dogs. If you keep making trouble this way, you may find yourself hit by a car one day, and that will be the end of you. Things like this are quite normal." At another point she pretended to call the factory, and told us that she had reached agreement with the factory, and that any worker who would leave the factory would be offered 10,000 yuan, otherwise we workers would "suffer the consequences." And so on and so forth.*

It never troubled the municipal government that there is a proper legal procedure for arbitration. According to the clauses on the arbitration of labor disputes in the labor law of 1995, when there is dispute a mediation committee is to be formed composed of the management, the workers and the trade union representatives. If the mediation committee cannot reach an agreement then any one of the parties can request the intervention of an "arbitration committee," which is to be formed by the management, the trade union and the labor department. The municipal government's "task force" was entirely unlawful.

Meanwhile the workers' representatives realized that they were being followed by mysterious men, in addition to being harassed by the local public order teams (to see if they had proper temporary residential cards, for example). Cheng Xiang and her fellow workers decided to report the situation to the police and tell them that they felt their lives were threatened.

*In the police station a fat policeman impatiently replied: "Here in Xiaojinkou Town public order is very good! We have police and public order teams all over the place. When you say that someone might harm you, who are you talking about?"*

*At this point we noticed that two of the men who had been following us were standing*

*right there in police uniforms, so we pointed at them and replied: "Those two."*

*The two policemen immediately walked out the room.*

On August 9, Power Pack and the government task force summoned the workers and announced their scheme to address their grievances.

- A ) Workers would receive the difference between the legal local minimum wage standard and the factory's minimum wages (workers were paid below the legal minimum wage for years).
- B ) Those workers with excessive cadmium levels or diagnosed with cadmium poisoning were entitled to the following:
  1. To remain in employment until retirement age and switch to positions which had no contact with cadmium;
  2. Annual occupational health examinations for all and treatment for those diagnosed with cadmium poisoning;
  3. Those who resumed work within 15 days would be given a 3,000 to 8,000 yuan of 'one-off subsidy';
  4. Those who preferred to resign were entitled to severance pay consisting of one month's wages for every year they had worked at the factory, plus a 'medical subsidy' equal to six months' wages.

Meanwhile, the municipal government ordered Power Pack and Advance Battery to stop all nickel cadmium battery production, in addition to a token penalty of fining the two factories 160,000 yuan.

The workers, however, were not impressed by the proposed scheme. For the

scheme to be just and effective, the workers first had to be confident that all medical judgments and diagnoses were trustworthy and correct. This was not the case. Some workers who had the symptoms of excessive cadmium levels were told by the hospital that they had been 'cured,' and they were thus disqualified from receiving the compensation and rights due to workers with that condition. In addition, the 3,000 to 8,000 yuan of 'subsidy' did not even cover the amount the workers had already paid for their medical examinations, treatment and other necessary fees. The workers thus came to the conclusion that the compensation package they were being offered was grossly inadequate. Furthermore, after being repeatedly bullied or cheated by both the Gold Peak group and the municipal government in the past, the workers had no confidence that these people would abide by their agreement this time, either. The workers therefore decided to refuse the proposal.

On August 24 they took a train to Guangzhou and petitioned the Guangdong Provincial government, but all they accomplished was handing in their petition letters.

The deadline for signing the agreement to the one-off subsidy payments was extended to "before September 1" but the content of management's proposal remained the same. With their options now exhausted, the Power Pack workers decided to petition the central government in Beijing.

Rumours of the planned petition trip to Beijing spread to the authorities who quickly moved to block the workers new tactic. Ticket sellers at the Huizhou railway station were ordered to restrict sales to three tickets per person. Nevertheless 28 tickets were successfully purchased in different ticket offices and on August 26, 28 workers boarded the train for the capital. For the workers the petition to the highest authorities was nothing less than a test of faith in their government. The following story of GP workers' petition to Beijing was told by **Li Xiaoyu** at the Power Pack factory. As we follow her footsteps to petition different ministries offices of the Central Government, we are also developing

an understanding of how these ministries respond to grass root grievances.

### **Background**

On August 24, the management and the government task force convened the Question & Answer Meeting of Workers with Excessive Level of Cadmium of Power Pack. On that meeting, the factory demanded that workers must make a selection between continuing working and quitting within 15 days. Anyone who would not make a selection within 15 days would be dismissed automatically. Workers were not satisfied with the plan, and put forward their plan to the factory.

But on the morning of 24, the factory's representative threatened: "Work, or quit the job".

Some managing staff talked a lot of nonsense: "if you are not satisfied, you can bring the lawsuit to Beijing! Power Pack has enough money (to handle the lawsuit)."

To ask help from the Huizhou government is useless.

Having no other choices, "we would petition in Beijing to see whether the Huizhou government would handle the incident or not." We were too naïve to think so.

At 3:10 p.m. of August 26<sup>th</sup>, we got on the train from Shenzhen to Beijing.

### **House Arrest – On a train!**

We all sat in carriage number two and began to relax. There was one nagging doubt, however: 'why isn't the local government doing more to stop us?' At roughly 11 p.m., we got our answer when some cops entered our carriage to check ID. We said we weren't criminals and asked for an explanation. The cops refused to explain and we refused to show them any ID. There was a tense stand

off until two of us lost their nerve and handed over their ID cards for inspection.

'Got them!' one cop said. They handed back the ID but took all our train tickets away. We began arguing with them and they got really furious. I grabbed our camera – it had no film in at the time – and began clicking away. One of them barked “no photos” at me. I stopped and packed away the camera but it had the desired effect as they stopped being so threatening and eventually left.

About 10 minutes later, two more policemen came to our carriage and asked to speak with two representatives. We asked who had sent them and in whose name were they going to talk to our representatives.

“The Huizhou Municipal Government”, one of them replied.

We refused and it looked like another stand off was about to happen until one cop said

“Look, we are just doing our job and have no choice but to carry out orders. We're asking you to cooperate”.

After considering the situation for a while, we selected two representatives to talk with them. Almost as soon as our two reps left the carriage we began to worry. We began to imagine the possibilities. Perhaps our carriage would be disconnected from the rest of the train. Or our representatives would be held hostage until we agreed to get off and go back to Huizhou. We called the two representatives on their mobiles, but they hung up without saying anything. We began to descend into a general panic...

The train pulled into a station and passengers got off. To our relief, we realised we were in Jiangxi Province and that the Huizhou government had less direct control over us now as we were out of Guangdong. The two representatives came back and said that the policemen had followed their orders and tried to



persuade us not to petition in Beijing. They said that they gave up as soon as the train crossed the provincial border. We were relieved but wondered if the Huizhou government would take revenge.

The train clerks came round to check tickets. They told all passengers who were not connected to Power Pack to leave the carriage. This really scared us. What were they going to do? As passengers began to leave the carriage, we pleaded with some of them to stay as witnesses. We said that if we disappeared no one would ever know the truth. Most of the passengers were sympathetic and complained to the clerks who then left. Only eight non-Power Pack persons remained in our carriage. These were good people and we began to discuss what we could do if trouble started. They promised us that if they saw officials from Huizhou government treat us badly they would call the police; and if Huizhou government people called the Beijing police, they would contact the media. One guy gave us his cell phone and home telephone numbers and told us to contact him if there was an emergency in Beijing. I asked myself: what would be awaiting for us when we arrived Beijing, the capital in which we had put in so much hope?

### **Beijing Shadows**

As the train pulled into Beijing Station, we were in a state of nervous excitement but the site that greeted us brought us back to reality. Waiting for us was a large group of officials from the Huizhou Municipal Government who had obviously flown up by plane. I counted 12 of them in all, including Xu (male) from the Huizhou Bureau for Letters and Calls who appeared to be in charge of this posse of government officials. Also there was Luo (female), Deputy Director of the Huizhou Labour Bureau, Yu (female), a deputy secretary from the Huizhou Sanitation Supervision Bureau, Ye (female) a deputy secretary from the Huizhou Foreign Economics & Trade Bureau and another guy who was dressed in a Huizhou Sanitation Bureau uniform. We didn't recognise any of those who were in plain clothes.

As we stood on the platform, they tried to bustle us along, yelling "Follow us! Follow us!" and some of them even tried to grab us and push us along. We shook them off and continued towards the exit. They were shouting things like 'director, we can't keep hold of them' and then Ye pointed out the two representatives among us and ordered: "Follow those two, they are running the show."

The passengers from our carriage who had stayed around to make sure we weren't dragged off began to leave when they saw us having broken through the hold-up. We half walked half ran out of the railway station but the government people followed us and started trying to persuade us to follow them. A kind of farcical, running stand off ensued.

"You can petition all you like. We just want to help you find accommodation."

We ignored them.

"We can help you to get around the city to the offices you need to go to. It's not easy in Beijing and we can help you to find them. We will make sure you get the petition to the authorities."

We ignored them.

"It is very dangerous here. We are worried about your safety."

Still we ignored them but we also started to split into smaller groups so they couldn't follow all of us.

At last, they gave up. Ye said:

"Let them go. They won't be able to find the proper Ministry anyway." We gathered again at a spot not far away from the railway station and started walking toward Yangfangdian where we had already arranged accommodation. When we got to the hostel, there weren't enough beds for all us but the staff were very helpful and telephoned another hostel located at Qianmen which they said was

the same price. This really cheered us up as Qianmen is a pricy district right in front of Tian'anmen. The government officials would get a surprise when they found out we were staying in Qianmen of all places! The hostel staff were as good as their word and when we arrived we found it was not too expensive for us. We set up camp in Qianmen and made plans for the following day.

### **At the Gate of All China Women's Federation**

Our first destination was the petition office of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF). Like many institutions in the capital, the petition office of the ACWF is not in the same place as the ACWF main building. We sent off two representatives to the petition office and the rest of us headed to the federation itself to stage a sit-in protest.

There are three gates to the Women's Federation. The main gate is usually closed and the two side gates are used by the staff. Wearing our Power Pack work uniforms we sat down at the side gate. Minutes later, a guard emerged to ask what we were doing. When we told him we had come from the south to hand in a petition he gave us a piece of paper with the address of the ACWF petition office. We said that we had also sent some people to the address on the paper but we wanted to talk to Wu Yi<sup>1</sup> as well.

The guard hedged, "The leader won't be in today. You might as well go back to your hostel."

One of us said, "When will she come? We'll leave once we've talked to her."

"I've been working here for years and I haven't caught sight of her yet! What chance of you lot got?"

At 9 a.m. a car with official plates cruised past us and headed towards the main

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1 Wu Yi was Minister of Health in 2004, but here the GP workers mistakenly thought she was head of the ACWF.

gates. A worker shouted out: "Look. The car number is 00000005. If that's not Wu Yi herself it's certainly a ranking state official." We moved towards the car and shouted at the occupants "We want to visit the leader. We have been treated unjustly! The Huizhou Municipal Government is evil! Chief, we need medical treatment!" The car doors opened slowly. Several elegantly dressed women emerged from the car. But as we approached them they simply carried on walking towards the gates and told us they were just guests of the federation. We just stood there and watched them disappear inside.

Half an hour later, a female staff member came out. We told her what we were doing and she said she would call the petitions office. Another half an hour later, she came out and said "Your representatives are in the petition reception office and your petition has been accepted. You can go now." Nobody moved.

After a while we got a text message from our workmate at the petitions reception office saying that they had already handed in the petition. The ACWF staffer came out again and tried to persuade us to go back to the hostel. She said it was too cold to hang around outside. We weren't happy about leaving until we had a full picture of what was happening over at the ACWF petitions office. At about 11 am the staff started to leave and the cold was really beginning to bite. We called it a day and went back to the hostel.

### **Power in the Union?**

Our experience of trade unions had not been a happy one. In Huizhou, the unions do not speak out or act on behalf of the workers. As such we weren't optimistic about what the central office of the trade union would do for us but we decided to submit the material as it seemed we had nothing to lose by doing so. A Hua and I were chosen to go to the ACFTU petitions office.

We took the 104 bus and before long had arrived at Fuxingmen. We asked an older guy for directions. He stared at us for a long time before he spoke:

“Why do you people want to visit the trade union?”

“We are a couple of working girls from the south looking for the ACFTU.” I tried to explain and ended up telling him our story.

He said “Many people come to Beijing to petition the authorities. In fact Wen Jiabao and Hu Jintao (the new Party and government leaders) are taking this issue of occupational safety very seriously. I don’t think your materials will reach those higher ups though. Only recently, more than 400 workers came from the north east to petition for payment of wage arrears and paraded in the streets with banners and shouting slogans. This certainly got them the attention they needed and the demonstration was even reported in the foreign media. They left Beijing and got their wages. The trouble for you is that there are not enough of your workmates in Beijing.”

All the same, he directed us to the ACFTU offices and we submitted our petition materials to the receptionist. She glanced at the paperwork and said: “I will pass on your material to the higher officials. There is not much we can do here as this issue needs to be resolved in Guangdong, not here in Beijing. You’d better go back there.”

Some of us had hoped that the ACFTU here in the capital would be different from Huizhou Federation of Trade Unions. At least they might give us some advice. We were very disappointed to find out that here in the capital things are no different from Huizhou. So we made our way back to the hostel.

### **Jia No.1 Yongding Men**

While discussing and planning our petition expedition we had heard people talk about a ‘petitioners village’. It was apparently a place near the railway station where people who had come to Beijing to petition could get cheap accommodation for as little as five yuan per night. It was beginning to look like we would be in Beijing for a while, so on the third day we appointed some of us to

go to the main petitions office known as the State Bureau for Letters and Calls at Jia No. 1 Yongdingmen and others to scout out the petitioners' village for cheaper accommodation.

I was chosen to go to the Petitions Office with several workmates. We got off the bus at the stop for the swimming pool and, after asking for directions, began walking towards Yongdingmen. After walking nearly half a mile, we saw a lot of cars parked up and a crowd of people sitting on the pavement.

I said to A Ying (my workmate, whom we later suspected had been bought off by Gold Peak.):

"What do you think they are all doing here?"

"Maybe they are organising some event or other. If you can say one thing for Beijing, it's not a boring place" she answered.

We carried on looking for "Jia No.1 Yongdingmen counting the blocks down, 15, 14... 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2... and then the street ran out! Perhaps, we had walked too fast and not looked carefully. We checked again, but still could not find number one. We checked several times it wasn't there. I bought a bottle of water at a store nearby and took the opportunity to ask directions. My experience in Guangdong told me that you've got to buy something to get a helpful answer.

"Excuse me. Do you know where is Jia No. 1 Yongdingmen?"

"Just over there!" He pointed in the direction I had just come from.

"We've looked over there but can't find it."

"It's just there, where all those people are."

"Why is there no doorplate?"

“It’s never had one.”

We headed down a muddy road lined with people towards a large crowd. Some of the people at the roadside started to complain but we pretended not to see them and just kept walking.

“What’s up? You’re queue jumping! Stand in line like everyone else!”

We carried on walking in silence and nobody stood in our way. Others hurled questions at us.

“Where are you from? Who are you?”

But we kept silent mainly trying to hide our growing alarm. What was this place with all these people? We all wanted to run back to the hostel but we kept going and after about 400 meters we saw a closed steel door with a small wooden board hung next to it: “Jia No.1 Yongdingmen”. We breathed a collective sigh of relief, we’d arrived!

A soldier appeared to be guarding the gate and this put us off attempting to go through it. We peeked through the small side door next to the main steel gate and could see a board on which was written, very faintly: Joint Reception Office for the Bureau for Letters and Calls of the General Office of the State Council and the Bureau for Letters and Calls of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

As we stood there, someone walked through the main gate without being stopped by the soldier. We decided to risk it and summoning our courage we walked boldly through trying to look like we knew exactly where we were going. We came out into a large yard with groups of people loitering around. I gasped out loud to the others:

"It's like a railway station at New Year Festival".

It was very crowded and chaotic. I felt overwhelmed, as if I really was at Guangdong Station at New Year Festival about to start the long journey home. This feeling continued as we entered a hall at one end of the yard. It was big and full of echoes with barred windows around which groups of people were crowded as if they trying to buy train tickets. Above each window was the name of a province: Hunan, Sichuan, Jiangxi ... It was the people's faces I remember most clearly though. They were faces full of suffering, of pain and of hope. The largest groups of people came from the Northeastern Provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. The next largest were groups from Henan and Shandong Provinces, then Hunan and my own Province Sichuan. We were surprised that there were so few people from Guangdong province. Did it mean that Guangdong is the best place in China? Well, we regarded it as both the richest and cruellest place in China!

We asked an on duty policeman how we should go about presenting our petition. He told us to queue up and get a reference number. Ah Ying got a ticket from one of the windows and we waited to be called. Thirty or so minutes later we were called into a small meeting room where two receptionists began taking the details of our petition. When this was over, they told us there was nothing to do but to go back home and wait for further notice, which would take about three months. Even then, there was no guarantee that anything would be done, as the petition officials might turn down the case.

As we were leaving the hall A Ying exclaimed, "Look at her!"

I looked in the direction she was nodding and looked away quickly. Nearby was a middle-aged woman, naked from the waist up, with only one breast. Where the other should have been was a black hole oozing pus. The hole seemed to stare at us, almost challenging us to show our disgust. I was so shocked that I could not even read the notices she had placed on the ground in front of her, explaining what had happened.



We made our way back through the crowd to the street where even more people were sitting on the roadside. We could tell that they came from all over China by checking the number plates on the many police cars parked in the vicinity. The police were there to check on the progress of petitioners from their hometowns. We rested for a while looking at all the people and then set off to look for the petitioners' village.

### **The State Bureau for Letters and Calls**

The next day we decided to try our luck again and set off for the Letters and Calls reception offices. People had been telling me how awful it was and no place for women. I was nervous and asked Xiaozhu to come along. Xiaozhu knew how to get there and is a big guy – the strongest among us in fact.

We left early and were off the bus at ten past seven. We started walking past the road with police cars parked along it. The condition of the road began to deteriorate and it seemed to me as though we were going beyond city limits into the countryside. I asked Xiaozhu how much further we had to go.

'It's just ahead of us,' he said, pointing ahead at what looked like a group of middle-age men brawling. As we got closer we realised that it wasn't a fight. The men were pushing and shoving an old woman who was dressed in torn clothes and obviously in a state of distress. She was shouting at them.

'My son died a miserable early death! Why won't you thugs let me appeal? You'll get yours in the end!'

'Take her away,' one of the men ordered and she was bundled, still shouting, into a police car.

We pushed ahead through the throng, but hadn't gone far when a crowd suddenly gathered around blocking our progress. A voice demanded

"Are you people agents sent [by the government] to block petitions?"

I had never heard this expression before and it sounded strange to me so I asked what it meant. Someone in the crowd shouted

"They are here to petition! Stop them!"

A few middle-aged men blocked our path and asked where I was from. I was taken aback and asked what that had to do with them. My question clearly annoyed them and before I knew it, they started pushing me around. Someone hit me on the head. Xiaozhu was a good deal bigger and stronger than any of them, and he took hold of me and pulled me towards and said loudly

"She's with me. We are from Guangdong Province."

"Oh, Guangdong! Why didn't you say so?"

And they let us through.

We continued between rows of middle-aged men sitting on stools at the sides of the road. Xiaozhu noticed I was getting very anxious he pointed forward and said

"We're here at last."

I looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a dreadful sight that looked more like a clip from a movie than real life. A huge crowd of people were milling about like they do in a railway station during Spring Festival. They looked grim and desperate, and all seemed to be aged over 40 and wearing tattered clothes. The smell coming from these people was very bad and not far away from where we were, someone who wanted to petition was beaten and crying out. Many others were standing in line by a tiny sign bearing the words: "Reception for

the State Bureau for Letters and Calls' and 'Reception for the National People's Congress Letters and Calls'.

Most of the people there had been petitioning for several years. Among all those in the crowd, Xiaozhu and I appeared to be the youngest, and noticeably wore the smartest clothes, though we weren't dressed up at all. It was this that accounted for the recent aggression towards us as they suspected we were government agents sent to stop people from petitioning. We went to the end of the queue and stood behind a woman who was aged about sixty. She turned around and told me

"My home is in Hubei Province where my daughter committed suicide after the local public security bureau director's son raped her. The local administration is completely corrupt and hushed the whole thing up. I have been petitioning for justice for four years and it has bankrupted me."

It seemed that her life had become a long and bitter journey.

She told us that the police cars we had seen parked along the road were from the Beijing offices of different local governments and that the people we had seen sitting by the roadside were probably plain-clothes officers. They were there to prevent people from petitioning and force them to go back home. She said that there were fewer petitioners than usual because Beijing policemen had kicked many of them out of Beijing on account of the approaching National Day public holidays and the authorities didn't want visitors to the capital to leave with a bad impression. Normally the queue to petition would be so long that it would have been pointless for us to join it. She told us that she had been in the petitioners' village for two months and that it would be worth staying there as it was generally cheaper than other places.

As the doors opened to signal the start of office hours, dozens of people surged inside like a rising tide. It took an hour before we even reached the doorway.

Inside the building there was a window for every province and people crowded around each one. We found the window for Guangdong and stood in line. We had barely settled in the queue when burly men approached and asked me where I was from. I had learned my lesson and gave no backchat this time, so I responded

"I am from China."

They bellowed back

"There is no place for people from China here!"

Then they pushed me out of the queue. I shrieked as one of them looked like they squaring up to hit me and Xiaozhu came over to my rescue. He drew me up close and told them we were from Guangdong and were together. As he was much taller and bigger than any of them, they backed off sullenly. Now I realised that my workmates had been right about needing someone to protect me. I would have stood no chance without Xiaozhu's help.

Finally it was our turn. We filled out the appropriate form and queued again. It was ten o'clock by the time we reached our window. The official behind the bars directed us to room number eight. We found the room and joined yet another queue. Three quarters of an hour later a middle aged woman told us to come in. As we were handing over the documents she snapped impatiently

"What are you playing at? Get a move on, we'll be off duty soon."

She kept telling me to hurry up as I tried to tell her our story. When I had finished, without looking up she told us to return to Guangdong and wait. As we headed out I heard one of the officials whose duty was to block people from petitioning say in an exasperated voice

“This work is too stressful, really. I’m going to apply for early retirement. If we don’t block their petitions, the bosses pressure us, and if we do, I feel bad about it.”

We realised that these officials in Beijing who dealt with the provinces were well aware that they were doing someone else’s dirty work, but if they didn’t do it, they’d be out of a job. We could see they were in an impossible position but that didn’t make it any easier for us. We never thought that petitioning in Beijing would be such a frustrating experience.

### **The Reception Office for the Ministry of Labour and Social Security**

After spending the morning at the Reception Office for the State Bureau for Letters and Calls, we took trolleybus 110 to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in the afternoon getting off at the Hepingli stop.

The staff at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security scanned our documents and asked how many of us had come to the ministry. I told her that two of us had come to the ministry but just then a man emerged from one of the nearby rooms and announced

“Would the representatives of the twenty people [from Huizhou] please come this way,” and he ushered us into a reception room.

“Are you aware that the number of petitioners should not exceed five? There are over twenty of you and this is illegal” he reprimanded tetchily.

As only two of us were in the reception office I concluded that he could only know there were more than twenty of us because the Huizhou Municipal government had sent a forewarning to Beijing.

He thumbed through our documents and then said

"You can only ask a local government to deal with this issue. We can't process it in Beijing, and you need to go through the Ministry of Health."

His attitude was hostile and uncompromising. With his words ringing in our ears we returned to the hostel even more gloomily than when we had left the Letters and Calls offices, stumped for ideas of where to turn next to further our case.

### **Petitioners' Village**

While in Beijing, we did take in some of the sites: Tiananmen Square, Zhongnanhai where the leaders live. These were not however, as might be expected, the most memorable places on our visit to Beijing. It was the petitioners' village that made the deepest impression on all of us.

We came across a bustling alley, reminiscent of a village meeting back home. One woman held her letters to me to read. These letters are for Premier Wen Jiabao, Chairman Hu Jintao and other national leaders. She had simply written their names on the envelopes thinking that was enough to get the letters to the country's leaders. The letters were well written as an educated fellow villager had penned them for her. I asked her if she really believed that her letter could reach the leaders. She replied with confidence

"I don't know. But even if the leaders received just one of these letters, the bad guys would be taught a lesson."

It is obvious that she had never heard of reports that every day the State Bureau for Letters and Calls burned several bags of letters sent in from all over China. So where would her letter with no address end up? Maybe only until the day when a modern Emperor Kangxi<sup>2</sup>, dressed in disguise, visited the people to find out the wrong doing of his mandarins, could this woman get her justice back.

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<sup>2</sup> Emperor Kangxi was the second Emperor of the Qing Dynasty. He ruled between 1662 and 1722. There have been folk lore about his visit to the people to find out the wrong doing of his officials.

Meanwhile, we still needed affordable lodgings and followed up a lead we were given. The rooms were as advertised – five yuan a night but once he saw us, the landlord was sceptical. He looked us up and down and said  
“You won’t like them.”

We insisted so he took us to the building they were in. I took a quick look and that was enough for me. Exhausted-looking male construction workers were lying in the beds; there were no women. After they noticed us they just looked away again, not like in Guangdong where such workers could be relied on to chat up any young female visitors.

Then the landlord showed us another building with rooms for three yuan a night. One room we looked at was unoccupied and stank sourly. I pinched my nose, and inspected the wide bunk bed. It didn’t even have any mattresses on. One of our men went off to inspect the nearby public toilets. They were about 300 metres away with wobbly characters for ‘male’ and ‘female’ scrawled on the wall next to a foul-smelling midden indicating the entrances. Our man returned at the double vowing not to eat for three days!

We looked in lots of hostels in back alleys for a place for five yuan a night but they were no cheaper than where we lived in Qianmen, and because they were not as convenient we abandoned the search.

Although our search in the petitioners’ village is not directly related to our struggle to get a hearing and help, I have included the details in our story as it was an important lesson to us. We realised that there were people out there much worse off than us and we needed to know that. In some ways it gave us a break from our own woes. I wonder if I’ll be feeling the same way in ten or fifteen years time when the suffering coming our way from Itai-itai disease really kicks in. The sky was as blue as before and the stream still running with fresh water. Yet my heart sank. I just wanted to swear out loud. It just makes no sense when I consider how wonderful and dear our country is to us, yet so many peo-

ple are suffering and in pain.

### **The Ministry of Health – Take One**

We returned to Qianmen by bus, but a few hundred metres from the hostel, I received a text message warning that the police were checking our rooms and we shouldn't go back until they had left. We hung around for a couple of hours until another text signalled that all was clear and we headed back. We entered the hostel discussing where we should move to, but the boss was reluctant to lose our business and tried to persuade us to stay

“Now the government knows you are here, it would make no difference if you move out as they will find you using the computer records. If you stay here I will give you a better deal.”

This made sense since the police had checked other hostels too and were likely to find us again, so we might as well take advantage of the landlord's offer.

We planned to go to the Ministry of Health the next day, but first A Ying and I were picked to take documents to the Ministry of Health's Bureau for Letters and Calls. We sat outside the office with a man aged about 40 who had a broken leg. He also came to petition, and had a big board hanging in front of his chest declaring his grievance. He told us, “My son died because of a medical accident. I've been petitioning for three years because the local authorities can't resolve the case and now I'm broke because of it. Local government officials had my leg broken to discourage me from petitioning.” He pointed at his broken leg: “You must be careful as you're so young. Don't let the people from the government to do harm to you.”

We handed over the documents and the receptionist told us they would be handed in for consideration and we should return to Guangdong to wait for the outcome. There was nothing we could do so we headed back to the hostel. It didn't seem right. We discussed what to do for a while and decided on



a sit down demonstration outside the Ministry of Health in the hope that this would spur them into making a decision. Just like last time, we put on our work uniforms. The man with the broken leg was still there with his sign. We didn't bother with the guard and sat down by the gate. Passers-by stopped to see what we were doing and before long a crowd had formed. People asked us about our problem and some came right up to us to read our factory cards and wanted to know where the Power Pack factory was located. They had never heard of Huizhou and remarked on how far we had travelled when we told them it was in Guangdong Province. We showed them medical history records, explained the harm cadmium does to people and how indifferent the managers were about it. We told them about the corruption among Huizhou government officials and their collusion with the factory.

Hearing all this moved some of them to tears. Next the guard came to collect our documents and took them inside. After about half an hour, a car arrived at the main gate carrying a squad of Huizhou government officials. They pretended not to see us and walked right past, but we got up and surrounded them demanding to know if they had come here to detain us or to slip a bribe to Ministry of Health officers.

One of us asked

“You pretend not to see us, why? Is it because you feel guilty for the things you have been doing?”

The local deputy director of the Huizhou Bureau of Health turned around and responded

“I simply ignore you, so what? Are you demanding compensation for this as well?”

Then they disappeared inside. When we were following them in, the guard came over and asked us to pick a few spokespersons to represent us in the dis-

cussions. We did and the representatives disappeared into the building..

Later the rest of us who were waiting outside spotted the Huizhou officials leaving by a back door as they hadn't the stomach to face us again. We sat there until noon but it seemed futile so we went to the CCTV offices between Yangfangdian Hospital and a garden to find their reporter, Sun Jingmei. When she first interviewed us in Huizhou she had said that the CCTV wanted to keep track of the case. We stood hopefully at the gate and told the guard why we had come. He went off and a woman arrived so we told her who we wanted to see but she told us that Sun was out of town on an assignment but she would talk to two or three of us if that was OK. The rest of our group waited outside in the garden.

We went upstairs to the office and the woman soon showed she was sympathetic to our cause. Her tender compassionate voice was a real breath of fresh air to us after all the indifference and contempt we had encountered in Beijing. When we told her about our plight, raking up the past and talking about our bleak prospects, we couldn't hold back the tears. The woman from CCTV wept too. Then she explained the awkward position the media were in and finally told us to go home while she would report our situation to her superiors. We went back down to the garden where the others were waiting and returned to Qianmen by bus.

### **Reception at the State Administration for Work Safety**

We had been in Beijing for six days and had made barely any progress. We spent the morning pouring over a map of the city to make sure we had been to all the relevant government departments. While doing this, we realised we had overlooked the State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS). Xiufang and I were selected to make the visit.

We walked from Qianmen to the Beijing Hotel and took express bus number 1044 as far as Xinghua Road where we saw a sign to the 'State Administration of Work Safety.' The office guard told us the Office for Letters and Calls was in a

different place but luckily it was close by.

We were served tea! A thoughtful middle-aged man called Mr Li was different from the other people we had encountered at government offices in the capital. For a start, he was friendly and we told him the whole story – tears and all. We also described how pleased we were when we landed jobs at Power Pack and how those dreams had been ruined by cadmium, and the gradual realisation that we had given the best years of our life to a company that didn't care. I cried as I told the story; Xiufang cried; the interviewer cried.

Then Huizhou government officials arrived. As they came into the interview room one of them said

“You must be quite something to be able to find such an out of the way place. It took us ages to find it even with a car.”

It was the SAWS interviewer who responded

“What's going on in Huizhou? They shouldn't have to come to Beijing to petition for justice. You can't treat workers like this. These women have had a raw deal.”

The government officials mumbled some kind of agreement, nodding their heads and such. This Mr Li gave us his phone number and said

“If Huizhou Municipal Government doesn't sort this out to your satisfaction, give me a ring.”

These were kind words and they cheered us up. We left SAWS in slightly better spirits. By the time we got back to the hostel though, we realised that nothing had changed and that the Huizhou authorities would not compromise. The following day we returned to Mr Li thinking that his sympathy and apparent sup-

port might help us to make concrete progress. This time, he was like a different person. He told us in a helpless tone: "Go back to sort your problem out. You can't solve it here. Go back, please." Then he turned his back and went to do his own work without listening to us.

It was such a let down.

### **Government Officials Raid the Hostel**

We returned to the hostel, cleaned up and had a meal. As we were discussing tactics for the next day, we were quietly informed by the staff that some government officials from Huizhou had arrived. I recognised most of them and they included Xu, Ye from the Huizhou Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Bureau as well as others from the bureaus of health, letters and calls and labour. There was another man who was something of a mystery as he had little to say and nobody recognised him. We assumed he was the driver. It was only after we had returned to Huizhou that we found out who he was – none other than the Section Chief Mr. Li from the Huizhou Public Security Bureau.

The guy from Letters and Calls started off the conversation.

"How are you? You're not easy to find."

We all stared at him but remained silent. Ye came back in the room where the 'conversation' was taking place but didn't say anything. Silence descended again but was shattered when Xiufang began yelling at Ye

"Not you again! Are you going to detain me this time as well?"

Xu tried to calm things down by being complimentary.

"Xiufang. What gorgeous shoes you have on. Did they cost much?"

Xiufang was wearing a new pair of shoes which she had just bought. Her old shoes were worn out quickly from walking too much in Beijing. The woman from the labour bureau continued with the compliments, feeling Xiufang's dress and exclaiming

“This is lovely. Tell me where you bought it. I want one too.”

Ye got in on the act as well complimenting Xiufang on where we were staying

“Xiufang I am surprised you could find such a nice place to stay in Beijing.”

It was clear to us that all this sweet talk was simply an attempt to prevent another outburst from Xiufang, hoping that by piling up the compliments they could ensure she would be too embarrassed to start shouting at them again. We countered by questioning Xu about why he had come to see us and who had told him to come. He replied that it was out of concern for us, to see if we had a place to stay and money to live on. We insisted that they had come to detain us, but that if they didn't sort out our grievance, we would stage a sit down demonstration in Tiananmen Square. He said that they could go with us to help our petition, but that it would not be a good idea to go to Tiananmen because it was too sensitive a place to stage a protest. The best thing to do, Xu argued, was to go back to Huizhou and resolve the whole matter with government help. The guy from the Labour Bureau added that another problem was that there was nobody from the factory management in Beijing. We said that the answer to this was to order a senior manager from Power Pack to Beijing. They stayed until eight o'clock and before leaving they promised to talk to the mayor of Huizhou on the phone and request that factory managers from Huizhou come to the capital to negotiate a settlement.

They were back the following evening. One of them stayed in one of our rooms while Xu came to ours and asked us where we had been that day. I was angry: “Why are you asking when you know full well what we've been doing?”

Another worker was even blunter:

"Look, old guy! We know that you've bought off one of our group, so you know our every move."

Xu just laughed but gave nothing away.

Two of the officials went looking in the hostel for three other workers who were Cantonese. They tried to persuade them to go home. Ye and Yu sat on their sofa waiting for them to come back, but they were hiding in one of our rooms. Meanwhile, Luo from the local labour bureau was in another room pressuring others in our group to leave Beijing.

It was getting really late so I suggested they leave but Xu replied that they were in no rush as they had moved from Wangfujing to a hotel in Qianmen so that they could 'look after us all the time'. At this point someone yelled

"I know you are not here to take care of us, but to harass us. It's no big deal. We will stage a sit down protest in Tiananmen if it comes to it."

"You are over reacting, lady. OK, you guys go and rest now. We will come to visit you tomorrow."

The next day they turned up with an even bigger squad, including officials from the Guangdong's towns of Shaoguan and Lianpin, whose mission was to persuade the three Cantonese to stop petitioning and go back. Then they made sure that no one could leave the hostel and by midnight the three had agreed to go back to Guangdong. They were moved to a more expensive hostel until they were flown back to Huizhou.

These developments dented our unity and our confidence. We were running out of money as well although the situation was helped by money donated by our fellow workers who were hospitalized in the Guangdong Hospital.

Once the three Cantonese had left Beijing, the officials began working on us in earnest. Luo said

“Factory management has refused to come here”

“May be it is more correct to say that it is the wish of the Huizhou government that they are not coming.” We replied.

“Of course not,” he argued laughing, “we are always on your side!”

“No matter what you say, it is up to your government to sort this out.”

“Our government is trying to and that’s why we came to Beijing, to help you,” he insisted.

“You’re not here for us. You have come to try and protect yourselves because you are afraid of more public exposure and losing your jobs as a result.” Luo then said

“You really should come up with a proposal for us to send to Huizhou for consideration.”

So we drafted a plan and they took it with them. Yu and Ye were unusually quiet during all this – maybe they wanted to avoid another row with Xiufang!

But for a couple of days now it had felt like something strange was going on. One woman in our group claimed her boyfriend had arrived and she kept going off to see him. We had our suspicions because she didn’t tell anybody what they were doing, still, we couldn’t be sure.

Next evening, the posse of officials returned as promised. Looking at our proposal Luo remarked that it was unacceptable to the factory and asked us to com-

promise. We had already made concessions, though, and asked them to try and revise it. So they made alterations there and then, promising that this would do the trick. However, they rang later to say it wouldn't work and that the Huizhou Municipal Government had worked out a new plan with the factory. We asked what was in it but they refused to say, just that we would find out when we returned home.

### **Ministry of Health – Take 2**

By now we had been to all possible ministries. Our request for urine tests at the Beijing Hospital for Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Diseases was turned down saying the materials had to be imported from US, which we regarded as an excuse rather than an explanation. The night before, in preparation for a sit-in at the Ministry of Health, we had written on a large white cloth sheet 'Cadmium has invaded our bodies. We will not sit and wait for death.' Underneath was an outline of our situation. We all took part in the demonstration, wearing factory cards on our work uniforms as before.

The weather was overcast, matching our mood, as we arrived at the Ministry of Health. Like last time we did not disturb the guard and sat down by the gate. Two of us stood in front holding up the cloth notice and a crowd of people soon gathered round us. Within half an hour, Huizhou government officials turned up with Zeng from the Beijing Office for Huizhou, and almost immediately a guard seized the cloth notice. Next a policeman took out a pen and asked for our names, but we refused to tell him. I asked why he wanted to know and he said it was for our protection. When we still refused one of the Huizhou officials told him.

The officials stood around grinning and chatting. We tried ignoring them, and whenever they spoke with one of us, the rest of us glared at that person, stopping the exchange. The officials were beginning to look bored when a very stylish woman, with what looked like an official card hanging round her neck, approached us to see what was going on. She raised a faint hope in me that she



would turn out to be a latter day Emperor Kangxi in disguise, so we told her all about it and showed her our work card.

At this the officials began whispering nervously and Zeng asked the woman whom she worked for.

“What’s that to do with you?”

Zeng demanded to see her work card.

“What for?”

He then told her to leave.

“I’m staying put. My being here is none of your business. You Cantonese scum are all the same. I can see in your eyes that you’re a rogue.”

It has to be said that Zeng’s eyes were the most sinister I ever came cross, his stare was as intense as a cobra’s. Even when he smiled, his eyes remained cold.

The mystery woman continued

“Don’t give up. Guangdong people are the lowest of the low and you should protect yourselves from them.”

We joined in the quarrel with Zeng but the woman left much to the relief of the officials. They had been afraid that the woman was a journalist or an investigating officer, but now they joked about her card:

“At first I thought that was a work card hanging from her neck, but it was just a travel season ticket, I needn’t have worried.”

Their complacency was maddening. Just then someone from the Ministry of

Health appeared and asked to see a representative. Everyone said that I should go.

There were three interviewers in the reception room sitting beside deputy directors from the Bureaus of Health and Labour and the director of the Bureau for Letters and Calls. One of the interviewers, a man aged over 40 roared

“Why are you kicking up such a fuss outside the Ministry of Health? You are making us look really bad! Tell us what this is all about!”

So I explained our situation and showed the evaluation report issued by the Huizhou Bureau of Health on June 2, 2004. After a glance at it, a female interviewer grumbled

“The standards are only breached in a few places and otherwise the factory is mostly OK, so it won’t affect you.”

I told her that we all worked in areas where the legal limits were exceeded, to which she had no response, so they then turned on the Huizhou officials because the Ministry of Health had a reputation to keep, which our sit-ins were damaging.

Even so, with no justification at all, the interviewers described as “quite normal” several points that breached safety limits in the evaluation. Eventually, they resorted to the usual mantra: the issue could not be dealt with in Beijing; it had to be resolved in Guangdong.

We left the reception room no further forward and totally frustrated. We knew there was no chance of getting anything sorted out in Guangdong and yet we were making no progress in Beijing. We walked outside just as it began to drizzle, the droplets forming tiny streams that dripped from my hair. Someone burst into tears, and this set others off. I didn’t actually cry, but a sad song kept

going round my head. The guard came over and realised we were upset

“Don’t cry. You have reported your situation to the leaders, and your government officials have left, so now there is no point in hanging around. You’ve done all you can do.”

The weeping intensified after his attempt at comforting us. Another guard said

“It’s turned chilly, mind you don’t catch cold. We sympathise with you too but don’t stand out in the rain, it’s bad for you.”

We stood at the gate. Someone among us asked for our cloth notice back because we intended to use it again. A guard offered to go and see, but shifts had just changed, and the new guards couldn’t find it. We started chanting for the return of the cloth and after a while, someone who looked like an official of some sort appeared and told us it had been confiscated by the Huizhou officials. Then he told us to go away as the officials had already promised to resolve our problem.

The full realisation of what we had been through here in the capital began to dawn on us. Our bleak prospects had us in floods of tears and this time I couldn’t hold back as our crying seemed to be the only outlet left for our desperation. Petitioning in Beijing had been our last hope and though I was the optimistic type, I began to feel wretched. They stopped work at five o’clock, so there was nothing for it but to trudge back to the hostel. When we arrived there we made a new cloth notice, intending to stage a sit-in in Tiananmen Square at last.

### **Going Home**

We were in dire straits. Our money was almost exhausted and confidence was at rock bottom, prompting talk of going home. The woman, A Ying, who we later realised had probably been the authorities’ mole lobbied us to return. (We did not suspect her then, partly because it was she who had spread rumours that

another guy might have been bought off.) Though some wanted to stay and keep trying, everyone was anxious, and the truth was that things were no longer in our hands. We thought it most odd that the officials did not come the following day. Could they already know we were thinking about leaving?

When they finally did come, they were obviously as pleased as Punch but tried not to show it. Even so there was a distinct smugness about them

“When we told you it would be best to go back, you insisted on staying and now you are forced to ask us for help.”

This made us really angry

“OK, we won’t go home. Instead we will have a sit-in at Tiananmen Square tomorrow.”

Li tried to smooth things out

“Let’s all just go back. Get packed and we’ll return tonight.”

After collecting our things at the hostel, we walked away dejectedly. They spread out among us to make sure none of us escaped. One of them took a few in a taxi and then we arrived at the Western Railway Station. Ye told us

“You know what I think, you are the hardest done by of all those petitioning in Beijing. The government pays for all the others, but you lot are paying for yourselves.”

“I thought your coming to Beijing might have ... ..But it turned out like this. We are just victims of a false alarm.” Yu chipped in.

Just then Xu came back and told us there were no berths left and we would have

to go hard seat. When we objected he retorted that they were doing us a favour, as they hadn't ordered us to go home. This was infuriating and we vowed to return to the hostel. We picked up our bags while Xu tried to calm us down saying he would try for beds again.

Then the female official started chatting to us. She asked Xiufang what a beauty like her would do when she arrived back. This really annoyed Xiufang

“What do you think? I've been poisoned by cadmium. Who's going to employ me?”

“You're beautiful. You could get round Yu.”

The traitor piped up

“What about me?”

“No problem. You have a good figure. Just ask for a job as a head of department.”

Xu returned and said it was time to board. They escorted us onto the train and then the female cadres left to take a plane back to Huizhou just as they stayed in luxury hotels while we stayed in a hostel. As the train headed South, Xu and Li watched us closely whenever we stopped at a station. They were worried we would get off. One time Yazi said she wanted to buy something on the platform but Li offered to go for her. Yazi said she wanted to see what was on offer, but Li went alone, coming back with snacks and water. They wouldn't even let us wander around. We asked Li how the Huizhou government would treat us. Li thought for a while and then said

“If it was up to me, I would take revenge on you.”

One of us asked Xu:

"Hey Old guy Xu, how would you treat us back in Huizhou?"

"Certainly we will help you guys."

I was furious.

"Stop bragging! I know what will follow. When we get back you guys will show us who the boss was."

This made the pair laugh.

I felt quite embarrassed about going back. Xiufang felt bad about it as well, and wondered what to say to our workmates. That night we all fell into silence. The next afternoon we arrived in Huizhou.

### **Letting us know who was boss**

On the evening of September 7, we waited in the factory's conference room. At 8:30 p.m. Xu and a government secretary arrived, both wearing severe expressions. The secretary opened a file and read out a plan that the municipal government and Power Pack had drafted. The plan infuriated us, but now they could crush us like ants between their fingers. We asked Xu about our salaries for August.

"Nothing!" Xu waved the question away and his face became even uglier.

When asked about our yearly medical checks that were due, he said that wasn't his business and we should ask the factory.

They closed the file and left.

Next day, we all terminated our contracts with the factory, it was the only thing we could do as all the workers we had left behind had already resigned. We were

regarded as being stubborn for going to Beijing. They had feared that the factory would not pay the money that they were due, so when they heard rumours that we intended to terminate they terminated right away. There was also a rumour that the factory was paying an extra 50,000 yuan to those who went to Beijing. I saw a male workmate who waved to me so I ran over to see what was happening.

“We have been getting along quite well ?” he said.

“So so. Do you want to borrow money?”

“No. I want to know the truth. How much money did you lot get?” He asked with a mysterious look.

“What do you think? The same as you!” I said angrily.

“I don’t buy that. If you didn’t get more money, what made you come back from Beijing?”

He was making me furious. Whenever we had taken the initiative they wouldn’t back us up, even cooperating with the factory to stifle any action and now they were questioning how much money we got. The factory would rather throw the money in the Pacific Ocean than pay for our medical treatment. They treated us just like the machines we worked on; a broken machine that is irreparable or whose cost of repair is too much, is thrown out and left to rot.

After terminating our contracts we asked for occupational health supervision files to be set up for reference in the factory. On September 15, we continued to negotiate with the factory, but Manager Ding said

“We won’t negotiate with you since you broke your word by disclosing the agreement.”

As we were now banned from all production sites, our dorms were the only places we could go, and the factory was refusing to pay both salary and nutrition allowance for July and August.

That night when we returned to the dorms, we found a notice with our names on it pinned to the wall. It said that as we were no longer employed at the factory we did not have access to the dormitories. They had posted two extra guards to make sure we didn't. We almost came to blows as we quarrelled with the guards. So we had to spend the night in a house rented by a friend from back home. Next day we were allowed into the factory, but only until the health supervision files were made available. We went to the municipal government looking for Xu, but instead a woman came out to see us. When she found out we were from Power Pack, she asked aggressively what we wanted. When we asked to see Xu she said

"He is out of town at a training session."

"Where? I just saw him at the Power Pack yesterday!"

"Leading cadres need not tell you where they attend training sessions!"

On the way back a car stopped as we arrived at Yunshan Road. Li, our escort from Beijing, was the driver. When he learned what had happened he called Xu who agreed to see us, and then we told him that we were very worried about the next annual health check, because none of us had details about the scheme and we didn't know about travel expenses or other expenses involved in coming for the test. Xu responded:

"Go and ask the factory!"

"What if the factory refuse to be responsible? We want an agreement now."



“If the factory do this to you, you can come to us.”

“Your government has been with the factory. If we do not solve it now, there will be no one we can turn to later.”

“I told you not to terminate your contracts, what do you expect now?”

“We want to see the Mayor.”

“The Mayor? You won’t be able to see the Mayor for as long as you live

One of us said in a low voice:

“We are not sure if this government will still be here (to receive us) in a year when we come back for check up.”

Xu was mad with anger.

“Yes! You are right! The government will not be here anymore! Go to the moon to look for it!”

We kept quarrelling for a while but it was a losing battle as he would not help, just like I had predicted on the train. So we left him.

The petitioning in Beijing was over, and still we had no peace of mind. We had had faint ideas about the Huizhou government before all this. Now we know, but let’s not to be too explicit over this point.

### **Postscript I**

One day the following year, one of my old workmates bumped into Li. He asked Li if it was true that one of our female workmates had been transferred by the head of a department to the Huizhou Hotel, but laughing, Li denied it. My friend told him not to be so complacent as she had hepatitis B. That wiped the

smile off his face.

### **Postscript II**

When China's second manned spacecraft, Shenzhou Six, was launched successfully in October 2005, I shared the elation of the whole country. The media reported that President Hu Jintao went to meet the astronauts. It suddenly came to me that I should have asked the astronauts or President Hu to pass my letter to the Huizhou Municipal Government, as they had told us they would be staying on the moon by then. I would have requested that they come down to earth by taking a free ride with the astronauts. If they did then I would have asked them to take a break from counting their money, and keep their promise to us. Unfortunately it did not happen. What I can do, then, is to gaze at the far away moon, imagining how the Huizhou Municipal Government is faring there.

It is such a pity that we are not able to meet them face to face.

## Chapter Six

# The Struggle Continues

On August 24, 2004, workers returned from petitioning Beijing without success. The Huizhou municipal government and Gold Peak Industrial (holding) Ltd were relieved. On September 3, the municipal governmental task force issued a joint warning to the workers from the two GP factories:

“Workers discharged from hospital are not allowed to disrupt the peace and order of production... they are prohibited from petitioning a higher level government without prior approval, or from instigating workers to make trouble. From September 4 onward, the public security organ will penalize those stubborn litigants as stipulated by law.”

Meanwhile, with the first batch of discharged workers still resisting the scheme imposed on them by the governmental task force and the factory, workers in other sections of Power Pack struggled to obtain their health exam results. The two separate struggles merged into a general strike in early September.

### **“We Are Ready to Risk Everything for Our Rights”**

#### **---The General Strike at Power Pack**

Cao Menghua recalled:

*In August, all staff in the assembly workshop and milling shop took their urine test. When the results were ready, workers were only permitted to “look at” the test results printed on a sheet of paper. We demanded the original test results but were refused.*

*Management left all negotiation to the governmental task force. On September 8, the workers quarreled with a task force official, who then grabbed a bench and threw it at them.*

*At that time I became furious. I led a group of workers to march to the personnel department. We divided people into two teams; one team approached the personnel department through workshops on the second floor, another, in order to arouse the wrath of workers on duty, through workshops on the third floor. The personnel department was informed even before we left the workshops on the third floor, and locked the door. We warned Cai Chunqiao that if he refused to unlock the door, we would break in.*

*We demanded the results but the factory still refused to give them. So we went on strike, blocking the road. At 2 p.m. we marched towards the municipal building. That day the rain was so heavy that the buses, full of workers from Power Pack, almost turned over. The workers elected me as representative when we arrived at the building. Four representatives entered the Bureau for Letters and Calls but were told to go back because the factory had already come up with a new scheme. We went back but found out it was just a trick.*

*That night we staged a general strike covering all factory workshops. The workers in the milling shops and assembly workshops demanded the test results, while the others requested a health check-up. We were ready to fight for our rights. In the initial period of our struggle, workers were not well organized and only a few line supervisors supported us. But this time, the line supervisors took part in planning how to make the strike successful. They appointed different batches of workers to block places, and they arranged shifts to guarantee the blockage was maintained around the clock. The strike was efficiently organized similar to the organization of production. The girl safeguarding the elevator told me: "Hua, I have locked up the elevator, and no one can take it now. You can relax!" Women workers in the assembly department got very excited when they noticed the success of their action -- earlier in May their strikes were unsuccessful. Some commented "Hey, when line*

*supervisors join us, it really makes a difference!"*

*Meanwhile the factory was preparing to load goods for delivery. We sent people to block the trucks from delivering goods. We were wide-awake the whole night. Trucks were not allowed into the factory and many workers surrounded them. All big tables in the canteen were moved to the gates --- a tactic we learnt from the workers in Advanced Battery.*

*The security guards were also on our side because their wives were striking workers too. The guards also wanted to have the health check-up because they were afraid (of over-exposure to cadmium) as well. Their sentry box was just opposite the door of the milling shop. The door was kept open and they had probably inhaled the deadly powders as well.*

*We had no choice but to fight.*

Despite the fact that the two-day strike paralyzed Power Pack, Gold Peak Batteries and the Huizhou Municipal government held the line without making any concession. They offered workers the same scheme they had offered earlier. Workers now had little choice. It was difficult for them to continue to work: they had no faith that management and the local government would keep the environment clean, or respect their legitimate rights as stipulated by the occupational diseases laws. If they chose to stay, they would risk further repression and trickery. If they decided to quit, they would get nothing -- neither medical subsidy nor severance pay. In contrast, if they chose to resign they could at least get something. Time was not on their side: they had only 15 days to make their decision. Eventually most decided to quit, which was what the company desired. The company appeared to give workers the choice, yet it made it difficult for outspoken workers to stay. On frequent occasions, workers were actually summoned to sign their resignation papers. The official seal and date had been fully prepared by the factory beforehand. In hindsight many workers repented their decision. Once outside they found it very difficult to hold management

responsible for their health and their legitimate benefits.

Many workers ran their heads against walls when they looked for jobs. Factory managers refused to grant these workers even an interview once they knew that they were from Power Pack or Advanced Battery. Companies feared they might be forced to take responsibility for their health or supposedly lower productivity of the new hires because they might have an excessive level of cadmium. Therefore the workers faced a downward mobility. Even if they managed to get a job, it was usually at a lower wage, had longer hours, was less secure, and faced more arrear of wages, which is more common among small enterprises. To look for jobs, hundreds of former GP workers now dispersed to different cities and provinces. Despite this, their struggle continued, both because of the prolonged effect of cadmium to their health and their determination to get justice.

### **Actions During Annual Regular Check Up**

The number of workers having excessive cadmium gradually increased from 177 in August 2004 to 400 in early 2005, while the incidence of chronic mild cadmium poisoning increased from two to 12. Most workers in the first category quit the factory in September 2004 but return for the annual medical check up. A 2006 survey of 126 workers with excessive cadmium showed that most suffered from some of the following symptoms: dizziness, lumbago, memory loss, hair loss, back pain, irregular menstruation, insomnia and anemia.<sup>1</sup>

The factories and local authorities continue to make things difficult for the ex-workers when they return for their annual check up. According to the law, people who were 'placed under observation' because of overexposure of cadmium are entitled to:

1. a proper annual medical examination in qualified hospitals .
2. travel allowances paid by the factories .

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1 *Investigation into Workers Affected by Cadmium*, Report on the Gold Peak Cadmium Poisoning Case, Globalization Monitor, March 2007.

3. food subsidies.
4. compensation for the loss of pay they do not get during travel and examination time.

On the morning of December 12, 2005, a year after many workers quit the factories, only a few of those “placed under observation” received notification to report to a hostel (not a qualified hospital) where their urine sample would be taken. With a loose network in place, the news spread and 200 workers from the provinces of Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Guangxi, Guangdong and the city of Shanghai eventually gathered together at Power Pack’s gate to demand the urine testing. Management’s initial response was “Who the hell told you all to come here for a body check?”

The workers, chiefly women, were furious when they were told they had to take off all their clothes, shower and provide a urine sample, all under the surveillance of unidentified people. Some workers had already been subjected to such a humiliating procedure earlier in 2004 but now it was the full 200 workers. They flatly refused, and were told “take it or leave it!”

The workers staged a protest outside the factory gate. This impasse lasted until noon. Cold and hungry, they demanded lunch. Management refused to talk to the workers and locked all the factory gates, stationing all its security guards nearby. Still without food, the workers staged a sit-in the whole night and following day, December 13. Meanwhile Hong Kong organizations learned of the action and staged a solidarity action outside the GP headquarters. They were accompanied by representatives of international trade unions and civil groups in Hong Kong attending the NGO’s conference that was parallel to the WTO Ministerial Meeting. A GP Hong Kong worker later recalled:

*Learning about the solidarity action, the GP bosses decided to dismiss the work force early because they did not want us to see the protesters.*

The collective action of workers and the solidarity protests in Hong Kong failed to make the factory and local authorities abolish the harsh procedure of taking urine samples, but it served the purpose of making the company pay workers the benefits to which they were entitled. Since then similar confrontations often occur every year when workers return for their annual medical check. Additionally, the Hong Kong action alerted European trade unions about the GP case. Later some of them began to support, in crucial ways, the workers' cause.

### Law Suits

In 2005-6, three groups of GP workers, one after another, filed cases against their employer for dereliction of duty during working hours. Each claimed 250,000 yuan in compensation.

<b>Batches of Workers</b>	<b>Representing Lawyer</b>	<b>Month and year of the 1<sup>st</sup> verdict</b>
Group of 65 workers (Power Pack and Advance Battery)	Zhou Litai	June 2005
Group of 244 workers (Power Pack and Advance Battery)	Liang Zhi	March 2006
Group of 17 workers (Shenzhen JetPower)	Zhou Litai	October 2005

The Huicheng District Court of Huizhou acknowledged: "to some extent, the workers were mentally hurt, but it did not render serious results." Thus the workers' claims were dismissed.

Later, the Huizhou Intermediate Court repeated the same opinion. However



the courts did not explain how they concluded that workers did not suffer any serious results. On the other hand, the appealing workers provided plenty of evidence to prove that they were suffering from serious losses – cadmium over-exposure resulting in physical pain; anxiety, stress and other relevant problems that caused some women workers to fear pregnancy after hearing that children of workers with excessive cadmium were born with serious health problems; other women workers were threatened with divorce by their husbands or abandoned by their boyfriends because of their exposure to cadmium.

On August 18, 2006, the Huizhou Intermediate Court dismissed an appeal from Xiang Zhiqing, a female ex-GP worker. The reason for the decision was that “the level of cadmium exposure of the plaintiff does not reach the standard level of cadmium poisoning as enacted by the state. Moreover she was not confirmed to suffer from occupational disease ... which thus cannot be judged as work-related injury”. This was not true. In fact, dating back to February 27, 2006, the Guangdong Hospital had diagnosed Xiang as suffering from occupational chronic mild cadmium poisoning. The Huizhou Intermediate Court simply ignored the evidence provided by Xiang.

The workers continue their legal actions. Since GP continues to deny them basic rights, they continue to assert their rights by filing lawsuits:

- Lawsuit of 148 workers demanding annual check-up reimbursement including transportation, nutrition fee, wages, meal and living allowance, etc. (2006)
- Lawsuits of 2 workers demanding reinstatement (2007)
- Lawsuits of 2 workers demanding diagnosis and confirmation of occupational diseases (2007)
- Lawsuits of workers demanding confirmation of workplace injury status (2007)
- Lawsuit of 85 workers demanding annual check up reimbursement including transportation, nutrition fee, wages, meal and living allowance, etc. (Nov 2007)
- Lawsuit of 101 workers demanding reinstatement. (Dec 2007)

Although local courts are not known for independence and impartiality, in some of these cases the court ruled in favor of the workers. This might be partly because the company's wrongdoing had been so obvious, but it is also because the workers tirelessly pursue their rights. In 2007 339 ex-GP workers won their lawsuit demanding reimbursement (wages, meals, nutrition allowance and transportation), totaling 783,321 yuan. In 2007 the court reinstated Xiang Zhiqing, the woman worker whose evidence the court ignored the year before, along with Tan ling.

After prolonged effort, in May 2007 authorities sent 27 children of women workers, who have either been poisoned or placed under observation for having excessive cadmium levels, for medical check ups. These children have health problems, some with excessive cadmium levels. On the pretext of ongoing research, the authorities have until now failed to reveal the test results, nevertheless this small victory has become a new point of intervention for the workers.

Without continuing their fight, ex-GP workers could not have succeeded in winning partial victory in these court cases. Since then they have filed even more lawsuits against the company.

### **Retaliation on Hong Kong Groups**

From July 2004 to June 2006, Globalization Monitor and other organizations launched more than 10 actions against the Gold Peak group, sometimes joined by GP workers. In the beginning the groups combined actions with attempts at direct communication with the company. They met with Victor Lo and Hui Wing Sun, director of GP Batteries, to voice the workers' grievances.

In January 2006, Globalization Monitor arranged to have four workers meet with company representatives Victor Lo, Hui Wing Sun, and also Chuang Siu Leung, the director of GP Industries, and Ding Guichang, the director of Advance Battery. But they simply turned a deaf ear to the workers' questions.

When Ding tried to say a few words, Chuang Siu Leung stopped him. When the workers requested that GP arrange a tri-party meeting between the workers, Huizhou Hospital and the GP, Ding Guichang agreed. He then asked a worker to provide the name and mobile phone number of a representative. When the worker hesitated, Hui Wing Sun immediately took out his mobile phone. With a jeering smile, he pretended to talk to someone, "Hello. How are you? How could I get in touch with you without knowing your name?" These wealthy people never give a thought to how vulnerable the women workers are, and how hard it was for them to stand up for their rights. Their effort to protect themselves became just a joke to management. Globalization Monitor's representative immediately rebuked Hui. This was to be the last meeting between Globalization Monitor and GP.

Globalization Monitor purchased a small amount of GP's shares and on April 20, 2006, its representative attended GP's Annual General Meeting. Meanwhile a group of two dozen demonstrators chanted slogans outside. The representative questioned Victor Lo as to why the company paid no attention to the fact that its supplier of nickel cadmium batteries in Hunan had provided sub-standard protection to workers. Victor Lo tried to stop this particular shareholder from speaking by saying the question was not on the agenda. When Lo failed to stop him, Lo yelled to the security guards,

"Guards, get him out of here!"

Globalization Monitor's representative persisted:

"I have the right to ask you questions!"

Immediately two tall security officers grabbed his arms and ejected him from the meeting. GP issued a statement the next day, saying that it was "extremely annoyed" by the group's actions, and "reserved the right to take legal action."

On June 4, Globalization Monitor and other local groups distributed a postcard with a cartoon of a skull-headed worker holding a GP battery. The caption reads: "Cadmium-poisoned workers recommend GP battery to you!"

A third party reported that the GP bosses were furious, claiming that this damaged their brand name. On June 28, GP's lawyer sued Globalization Monitor, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and the Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre, the three who endorsed the postcard. GP accused them of libel, and demanded an official apology with compensation of 500,000 HKD. The three groups decided to make a legal defense.

GP might have hoped to shut down the campaign through taking legal action but this backfired. More than 30 Hong Kong groups, including trade unions, church groups, community groups and student unions protested GP's libel suit. Chong Chan Yau, former Executive Director of Hong Kong Oxfam, and a member of the grant committee of the GP Batteries Industrial Safety Trust Fund, resigned from the committee in protest. He wrote:

First of all, I do not wish to be associated with a body-check process that is degrading and disrespectful to the workers, a matter I raised in the first meeting.

Secondly, I do not support Gold Peak's decision to bring legal action against NGOs who wish to speak on behalf of workers. This is a principle of civil society.

A letter from Legislator Emily Lau, addressed to Victor Lo, criticized his handling of this case.

Meanwhile, the international labor movement and some NGOs launched a solidarity campaign both with the GP workers and the Hong Kong groups. The International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) wrote to GP "to express our

dismay at the commencement of legal action you have taken against one of our affiliates, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade unions, along with two other local Hong Kong labour groups.” The Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions (FNV) wrote to the GP head office in their country to ask it “to take your responsibility for this terrible situation of the workers in the factories of Gold Peak Industries.” Other supporting unions included the International Metalworkers’ Federation, International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Union, and the General Labor Federation of Belgium. Some of the unions provided valuable practical support crucial in helping workers to seize some concessions from the company. The Réseau-Solidarité, an NGO in France, started a “one-person one-letter” campaign, and sent 3,000 letters to GP, protesting their action.

Yet even the uproar from civil society did not force GP to drop its case. In spite of the libel case still being active, the three groups, with support from others, keep up the momentum of the solidarity campaign with GP workers. Meanwhile, GP’s stock went from 2.6 HKD in early 2004 to 1.2 HKD in early May 2006. This fall is contrasted with the general rise in the HK stock market.

The fact that GP Batteries’ profit dropped 96% in 2005 was a warning sign to shareholders. While rising oil prices and the prices of raw material were factors that contributed to the fall, we reviewed the performance of other manufacturing stocks in the same period and discovered that they fared much better. Some financial commentators said the decline was the result of the “market” being worried about how workers’ compensation claims might affect GP’s future profit margin. From 2006 onwards the “market” might worry less about possible compensation, but GP’s shares have been unable to reverse the long downturn.

### **The Domino Effect of GP Workers’ Struggle**

While the number of workers carrying excessive cadmium dropped from more than 400 to 210 in early 2008 --- if we are to believe the official laboratory inves-

tigation --- the number of those poisoned rose from two to 21. Given the nature of cadmium we can expect more poisoning cases in the future. Additionally, there are three workers who have already been suffering from kidney failure --- which is possibly cadmium related --- and are taking legal action against the company. The fight against GP cadmium poisoning will be a long battle, for the workers' health as well as for the truth.

Although Gold Peak has stopped its production of the nickel cadmium battery, it continues to profit from it by outsourcing it to Corun High Technology Co., Ltd in Hunan. According to our investigation, workers at Corun have not been given proper occupational safety training about cadmium. Additionally, their protection devices are sub-standard. If there are workers poisoned by cadmium, they may not even be aware of it and will thus be unable to hold the management responsible. The cadmium tragedy is just transferred elsewhere. Globalization Monitor has more than once questioned GP on this issue but the company refuses to respond.

What has been accomplished, then, after such a long struggle? It must be admitted that the workers' main objective --- to receive full medical care, fair compensation and re-instatement -- has not yet been achieved for most. However, the workers know very well that if they had not initiated their resistance, they definitely would have been left to rot. The fact that they more or less get medical examination and reimbursement, has been the result of their own struggles. In addition, after the incident Power Pack and JetPower have significantly improved the working conditions and occupational safety standards, benefiting the workers there (Advance Battery was closed).

Apart from the direct gains there are also indirect ones that are important. Shortly after the outbreak of the GP cadmium poisoning case, workers at Huanyu and Panasonic began to raise demands for testing. In both cases, the workers learnt about the GP case through news reports and, once alerted, held the management of those factories responsible. Without the GP workers begin-

ning the fight, other workers in the battery industry might have never known that the red powder they are in contact with day in and day out is poisonous.

The Huanyu Group operates in Xinxiang City, Henan Province. Its branch company, Huanyu Power Source Factory of Xinxiang County, employs 2,500 workers and produces the nickel cadmium battery. At the beginning of 2005, several panicked workers, hearing of the cadmium poisoning at GP, demanded health check-ups. Then hundreds of workers sought testing at the Prevention Station of Occupational Diseases. It turned out that 1,020 workers had excessive urinary cadmium levels, with 11 diagnosed as victims of occupational chronic cadmium poisoning. The workers demanded that the company provide treatment. When refused, furious workers fought with the security guards. It also turned out that there were 29 places in the factory where the occupational hazard exceeded the permitted level. In one of the workshops, the cadmium level in the air was 120 times the permitted level! Eventually both the workers' protests and the news were repressed.<sup>2</sup>

The Panasonic case involved more worker actions but the result was the same. In December 2007, the CCTV (China Central Television) broadcasted its second report on the GP case and aroused attention of workers from the Wuxi Matsushita Battery Co., Ltd (WMB). By early January, the workers at WMB staged several strikes to hold the company responsible for their cadmium poisoning.

In 2002 Panasonic relocated its nickel cadmium battery production to Wuxi and founded WMB. Employing 5,300 workers, WMB is situated at New Sci-Tech District, Wuxi City, Jiangsu province. Most of its products are exported to Japan. WMB's parent company, Panasonic, is one of the country's top 500 enterprises, and has branches in Shenyang, Wuxi, Shanghai and Zhuhai.

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2 General Office of the National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/rmzxb/myzk/200512050039.htm>

WMB failed to comply with the occupational safety laws that require employers to provide efficient protection to workers against occupational hazards. The employer only provided workers with cheap cotton masks every other day.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, pre-work training was inadequate:

“Although the company presented workers with training relating to work safety and protection when they got recruited, the contents of the training mainly focused on hazards like nitric acid and potassium hydroxide and how to prevent potential harms. Though the trainer had mentioned the hazard of cadmium, he failed to instruct them how to avoid it.”<sup>4</sup>

Since 2003 the factory has arranged medical checks on workers' cadmium levels, as required by law. According to the news report, between 2003 and 2005, 87 workers were found with excessive cadmium levels.<sup>5</sup> Judging from other published news reports<sup>6</sup> this might be an underestimate. However management failed to disclose the results to affected workers.

On January 4, 2007 the workers demanded that the company release its test results. Under pressure, WMB provided workers with copies of the results, but workers noticed that on some the date of the check-up was *after* the date the result was recorded. For example, one worker had a health check-up on August 18, 2006, but the report was dated August 16, 2006, two days earlier!

Moreover, the reports of urinary cadmium were written out by hand and did not bear the official seal of Wuxi Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. In other handwritten reports the number indicating excessive cadmium levels seemed to be tampered with. When questioned by a journalist from *First*

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3 “The Event Happened on January 4 Had Shocked Thousands of Chinese”, see: <http://www.chinajapan.com.cn/index.asp>

4 Ibid.

5 *Nanfang Daily*, <http://www.sina.com.cn>, May 29, 2007.

6 <http://it.sohu.com/s2007/panasonic-zhongdu/>



*Chinese Business Daily*, Zhu Xiaoyu, the director of Wuxi Center for Disease Control and Prevention, explained: “It’s a clerical error!”<sup>7</sup>

The workers just did not believe Mr. Zhu. They suspected that the company had fabricated the results. They demanded that WMB provide an explanation and compensation. But management turned down their requests. The furious workers then took action. On January 4, the workers in the nickel-metal hydride battery department stopped production. Over the next days, other workshops’ workers joined the strike.<sup>8</sup> By the morning of January 8, more than 1300 workers in five workshops on the first floor went on strike. Full of rage, workers blocked the factory gate for eight hours. The striking workers kept telephoning the media throughout the province, but none dared to show up.

Desperate, the workers elected five representatives and sent them to negotiate with the company, demanding a second check-up in the Provincial Hospital for Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Diseases. Management claimed that it was impossible to conduct a second check-up at the hospital because their testing machine lamp was damaged. The second check up could only occur on site, carried out by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of Changzhou.

Also on January 8, the Wuxi municipal government set up a task force, including officials from the sanitation bureau, labor bureau and trade union, to negotiate with five worker representatives, but the meeting yielded no results.

On January 9 nine workers acquired the results of self-paid health check-ups conducted by Jiangsu Hospital for Treatment and Prevention of Occupational Diseases in Nanjing. They found out that their check ups revealed a much higher level of urinary cadmium. However the company refused to recognize

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7 January 17, 2007. See <http://www.eastmoney.com/070117,549114.html>

8 “The Cadmium Poisoning Incident in WMB: A Dispute upon Reports of Health Check-up”, see *21st century Business Herald*, by Zhou Yang, on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2007.

these results.

The workers decided to take bolder action. On the same day they put on their factory uniforms and marched more than ten kilometers in cold wind toward the municipal building, appealing for local government intervention in their favor. The government intervened, but on WMB's side. They dispatched armed policemen to intercept the marching workers. They beat them up, forced them to board buses and sent them back to the factory. Three women workers were arrested because they refused to board the buses. Many workers broke into tears when they saw their fellow workers being taken away.

On the second day these workers were courageous enough to stage another demonstration, but they were met with the same repression.

The public relation department of Panasonic Corporation of China issued a statement denouncing some of the news reports as "seriously flawed" and warned that they would take legal action against those responsible. However, a report issued by *21<sup>st</sup> Century Business Herald*<sup>9</sup> revealed the real story. The reporter interviewed Pan Wei, the fired vice-president of personnel department of Panasonic (China); Pan admitted that the company manipulated the laboratory results.

Under the combined repression from both the municipal government and the company, many workers were forced to resign. Those still working choose silence to protect themselves. From beginning to the end, the characters, the plot, the scenes, and even some of the dialogue in the Panasonic story is pretty much the same as in the GP case.

Over the course of these three cases at least 10,000 cadmium-affected workers experienced collective actions against irresponsible employers and government officials. Through media reports their stories have spread further across

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9 One of the subsidiaries of Nanfang Daily, more details at <http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/21cn/>

the country. Their struggles have alerted battery factory workers about specific occupational health hazards and promoted safety training around cadmium. And it is here that the GP workers' effort and bravery must be remembered. It was they who started the whole process. What is more, their case for justice and health is far from over.

### **We Are All Connected**

--Environmental Degradation by Cadmium

In December 2003 The Gold Peak Batteries claimed in its internal bulletin *Sylva Express* that

“the management always pays extra attention to industry safety. And the Industry Safety and Environmental Protection Committees was respectively established in the Hong Kong headquarters and its subsidiaries in Mainland China. These committees are devoted to promoting workers' consciousness of industry safety, improving designs of machines and providing workers with a safe working condition.”<sup>10</sup>

A report published in *Mingpao*, a Hong Kong daily, on July 4, 2004, half a year after *Sylva Express'* boastful claim, deeply embarrassed the company. The report's title was “Local Villagers Suffers the Disaster of Cadmium Oxide Pollution from GP Battery Factory”:

“The incident of cadmium poisoning in the Hong Kong-invested factory tends to overspread. Yesterday, many villagers nearby the factory reported that they were tested with excessive levels of urinary cadmium. It means that besides employees of the factory, the local villagers also became victims. Now, the villagers and households nearby were quite nervous. Many of them dare not drink tap water. By far, Huizhou municipality doesn't take any step to handle the situation.”

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10 Vol.9 December, 2003.

“Huizhou Power Pack is situated at Dashulin Village, Xiaojinkou Town, Huizhou city. There are about 3,000 villagers and migrants. A motorcycle driver whose family name was Zhu told the reporter that last week he went to the battery factory to ask for a job. He was found with minor excessive cadmium level. Mr. Zhu was confused. He wondered why he, too, had excessive cadmium, since he wasn’t an employee of the factory before. Then he learnt that many villagers had the same problem.”

A nearby kindergarten was so afraid of possible cadmium poisoning that it moved away as soon as possible.

On July 22 Green Peace sent a team to investigate the community around the Advance Battery. *Mingpao* reported on its finding on October 4:

“The sewage, the sediments in sewage and dust samples outside the Advance Battery all contain high concentrated heavy metal cadmium, which can cause cancer. The level of cadmium in sewage is more than 19 times the permitted level both in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The possibility that the battery factory might have caused the pollution cannot be excluded. (Green Peace) demanded the factory provide an explanation. Cadmium in sediments and dust was 100 to 7000 times the permitted level.”

The following day the Gold Peak Industrial (holding) Ltd. issued a statement, declaring

“the Environmental Protection Bureau of the Huizhou government has been carrying out periodic checks and inspection on the factory’s facilities, including the cadmium level of the industrial waste water. Our industrial wastewater treatment system and discharge have been certified as compliant with the relevant standards. ”

What the GP statement left out was domestic sewage from the factories. We

obtained the November 8, 2004 minutes of a joint meeting between the management of Power Pack and a representative from the Hong Kong Productivity Council. According to the minutes, “Power Pack discharged its domestic sewage without any treatment; for instance, laundry wastewater is directly discharged into rivers and lakes.” Let us not forget that the uniforms worn by workers were full of cadmium dust, and laundry wastewater probably contained a considerably high level of cadmium as well.

The Gold Peak case is by no means an isolated incident. The New Sci-Tech District in Wuxi, which houses many Japanese factories, including WMB, reported that since its founding, local people noticed the extinction of birds in the neighborhood. They also reported that the surrounding river turns black.

An unanimous article was posted on the well known website *Tianya*, reporting an inside story about battery producers:

“Once I had a private conversation with an engineer of a top nickel-cadmium battery manufacturer, discussing how they treat the cadmium oxide wastewater. He mused for a moment and said, ‘no manufacturer will spend too much money in treating wastewater. Most times we just do it half-heartedly. The local government simply turns a blind eye to this because we are one of the biggest taxpayers. Sometimes, wastewater is directly discharged without any treatment at all. By and large, the soils around the factory were polluted.’ If even the top battery producer behaves like this, then what would those lesser producers do? I cannot help feel sorry for Huai River. Despite billions of yuan having been pumped into the project of treating pollution in Huai River, the pollution is getting more and more serious.”<sup>11</sup>

Pollution is not limited to the Huai River. The whole Pearl River Delta has

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11 See “The GDP of China Advances in the Shadow of Industrial Pollution”, cited from *By-talk of Tianya*: <http://www.tianya.cn/>

been polluted by heavy metals, including cadmium. According to the investigation into the soil conducted by State Environmental Protection Administration of China, four-tenths of the farms and vegetable plots in the Pearl River Delta have been polluted by heavy metals. For example, in Zhongshan City, the concentration of cadmium, nickel and copper in vegetable plots were 50%, 43% and 10.9% above the permitted level respectively. A random sampling of vegetables by the Zhongshan Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that they carried cadmium that was 9.9 percent over the permitted level.<sup>12</sup> These vegetables are transported to cities throughout the Delta. Earlier, the Consumer Council in Zhongshan noticed that the cadmium exceeded the permitted level in five aquatic products including freshwater clams, scallop, oyster, clam and cuttlefish. The volume of cadmium in scallops is 33 times over the permitted level.<sup>13</sup>

China may not be the worst country in the lax enforcement of laws on occupational safety and environmental protection in the world. The fact that China consumes half of the world production of cadmium and its combination with lax enforcement of laws implies the gigantic scale of the cadmium pandemic which no other countries can compare, though.

But the cadmium pandemic, a result of the shifting of battery production to China, does not only affect the Chinese people. The legacy of the cadmium battery industry is that it contaminates even after the factory is shut down, as the *Wall Street Journal* reported:

“The near-disappearance of the American cadmium-battery industry can be understood from a visit to an overgrown field in Cold Spring, N.Y. Here, the Marathon Battery factory churned out nickel-cadmium batteries for the U.S. military for three decades. After the plant was shuttered in 1979, the cadmium-laden ground became one of the nation's highest-profile super fund sites, sparking a \$130 million clean-up and a class-action lawsuit by nearby residents

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12 See: *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, published on December 18th, 2006.

13 See: *Mingpao*, published on September 27, 2006.

that was settled for millions of dollars in 1998.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, cadmium travels around the world in the form of consumer goods, especially toys. In the United States this has resulted in recalls of a number of metallic toy jewelry items by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. In 2006 high level of nickel, cadmium, copper and zinc was found in a bracelet exported by China which was hazardous to children’s health.<sup>15</sup>

A month after the *Wall Street Journal* reported on GP case the same Journal reported that

“TOYS ‘R’ US Inc. said it will begin phasing out nickel-cadmium batteries, the making of which has caused widespread environmental contamination in China and poisoned hundreds of factory workers.

Most of the new safety initiatives aim to protect the health of the consumers. The cadmium-battery phase-out is a sign that toy retailers are also under pressure to consider the health of the workers and citizens of China, where the majority of the world’s toys are made.

Some toy makers, including Hasbro Inc., have already launched their own bans on cadmium batteries.”<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that neither the shifting of cadmium battery production from the West to China, nor the 2006 banning of electrical appliances which contain cadmium in EU, nor the action of TOYS ‘R’ US Inc. to phase out nickel-cadmium batteries, is enough to keep those countries safe from cadmium contamination. It is going to haunt workers, consumers and the general public for a long time to come if we do not do something about the cadmium pandemic in China. It is time for us to campaign for extending the EU ban on cadmium products to China and the rest of the world.

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14 Toxic Factories take toll on China’s Labor Force, by Jane Spencer and Juliet Ye, January 15, 2008, [http://online.wsj.com/public/article\\_print/SB119972343587572351.html](http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB119972343587572351.html)

15 <http://www.albany.edu/ihe/Cadmium.htm>

16 <http://chinese.wsj.com/gb/20080218/bus132814.asp?source=channel>, February 18, 2008.

### Chronological Table of GP case

Year	Month and Date	Events
2003	Oct & Dec	Two Power Pack workers found in their blood tests that they had excessive cadmium. The workers at the Milling Shop fell into panic. Workers collectively staged a go-slow.
	Dec 3	Power Pack arranged doctors from Guangdong Hospital to travel to the factory and drew blood tests. Those with serious excess of cadmium were sent to hospital.  The second batch was sent to hospital on Feb 24, 2004.
2004	May	Around 50 Power Pack workers in the assembly department paid for their own laboratory investigation and found out that most of them suffered from excessive cadmium. The factory rejected worker's demand for official medical examination. Some workers complained to the governments of Guangdong Province and Huizhou.
	May 24	Power Pack management arranged 540 assembly line workers in batches to undergo blood tests but did not announce the result.
2004	June 9—11	Assembly line workers went on strike. Power Pack management distributed a small piece of paper with test results to workers and offered to send five workers to hospital each time. The workers rejected.  Advance Battery was forced to promise laboratory investigation for all assembly line workers.
	June 12—18	In order to get the original blood test report, the Power Pack workers went on strike again and succeeded. When workers whose blood cadmium exceeded the permitted level they demanded for hospitalization. The management responded that only urinary cadmium count. So workers demanded for tests on urinary cadmium. Eventually only 121 workers were arranged for urinary test. Workers continue to send representatives to petition the local government.  Eventually 106 workers were sent to Huizhou hospital, and 22 workers with more serious conditions were sent to Guangdong Hospital.
	June 21	450 Advance Battery assembly line workers had blood tests and more than 130 were diagnosed with excessive cadmium.



Year	Month and Date	Events
June 29		<p>Power Pack forced four workers to be discharged from hospital.</p> <p>Advance Battery only passed a small piece of paper with blood test result to workers. Workers demanded for original and went on strike, blocked the road and demanded improvement of working environment. The factory stopped all production.</p>
July		<p>Early July, the Huizhou government set up a task force to station in Power Pack to deal with the workers unrest there.</p> <p>The Sylva Industries Ltd, Hong Kong subsidiary of Gold Peak, was found that 21 workers had excessive cadmium and 3 were diagnosis as cadmium poisoning. The case was not reported until Nov 2004.</p>
July 3		<p>Hong Kong media reported the cadmium outbreak in Power Pack.</p>
July 5		<p>22 Power Pack workers' health was declared as 'normal' and were discharged from hospital.</p>
July 6		<p>GP advertised in newspapers to deny the workers' allegations.</p>
July 9 –		<p>Guangzhou: 7 workers were forced to be discharged from hospital.</p>
Mid of July		<p>Huizhou: 63 out of 106 Power Pack workers were discharged but they managed to win the battle of getting an official diagnosis as "placed under observation".</p>
July 11		<p>More than 400 Advance Battery workers were found with excessive cadmium.</p>
July 15		<p>More than 110 Advance Battery factory workers' urine test result showed excessive cadmium and were sent to the hospital.</p> <p>59 discharged Power Pack workers began to press the management for negotiation.</p>
July 20		<p>Workers who had left the plants pay their own fees to get medical examination in Guangzhou and found themselves with excessive cadmium.</p>
July 22		<p>Greenpeace investigated cadmium contamination in Huizhou</p>
July 23		<p>More than 30 groups with about 40 activists in Hong Kong protested at the GP headquarter in HK.</p>
July 24		<p>35 Power Pack workers petitioned Provincial government to oppose the scheme of Huizhou government.</p>

Year	Month and Date	Events
	August	The Hong Kong Labor Department notified the Gold Peak Company to improve its ventilation and sanitation in the Hong Kong factory.
	August 2-3	2 workers were diagnosis as mild chronic cadmium poisoning. Huizhou government held a media conference and made a commitment to help workers.
	August 9	The Huizhou government and the Power Pack management offered a settlement to affected workers which included: 3000-8000 yuan of one off subsidy, severance pay and medical subsidy for those who wish to resign. The offer was pegged to the condition that workers must return to work or resign within 15 days.
	August 11	CCTV broadcasted the program on the Gold Peak case.
	August	Assembly line workers in Power Pack struck to demand medical examination.
	13—15	177 Power Pack workers were certified with excessive cadmium and 2 with chronic poisoning.
	August 17	Advance Battery workers demonstrated in front of Huizhou government office to demand for medical examination.
	August 26	28 workers petitioned in Beijing and return to Huizhou on September 2.
	Sept	The Hong Kong Labor Department fined the Hong Kong factory of the Gold Peak Company for failing to provide effective protective devices to workers.
	Sept 1	HK Polytechnic U students put up posters and criticized Mr. Victor Lo, also President of the board of directors of Poly U.
	Sept 3	Huizhou government and Power Pack jointly warned workers if they petition Beijing again they would be charged.
	Sept 5	80 JetPower workers were found with overexposure of cadmium. It was until Oct that the report was released.
	Sept 8—11	All Power Pack workers went on strike for 3 days and prevented the factory to deliver goods to demand for proper medical examination. They succeeded. On Sept 10, Hong Kong groups protested against GP in HK during its Annual General Meeting.
	Sept 22	GP CEO Victor Lo admitted for first time: the careless management caused the incident and GP would set up a Fund.

Year	Month and Date	Events
	Oct	Many workers resigned from Power Pack and Advance Battery. A batch of 128 workers questioned the laboratory results released by the authority.
	Oct 3	Greenpeace released its report on its investigation on Advance Battery.
	Oct 25	The Chongqing TV Station broadcasted the program “Huizhou Cadmium Excessive Incident”.
	End of Dec	65 Power pack and Advance Battery workers filed a lawsuit against GP.
<b>2005</b>	Jan 18	China Youth Daily reported on JetPower Incident.
	March 18	Court proceeding of the first batch of GP workers started.
	May 18	Second court proceeding of the first batch of GP workers.
	May 19	Liu Jinzhou, Mayor of Huizhou, met with Victor Lo
	June 23	1663 workers at the battery factory of the Henan Huangyu group started to pay for their own laboratory investigation around cadmium after they heard of the GP case. In Sept there were a total of 1020 workers were found with excessive cadmium.
	June 24	The first batch of GP workers lost the law suit.
	July	JetPower moved the nickel-cadmium battery production machinery to Hunan.
	August 16	The first batch of GP workers got the verdict.
	Oct 11	October, Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of HKSAR government, appointed Victor Lo as a new member of the Executive Council.
	Dec	GP workers (mostly women) were ordered to undress and took showers under the surveillance of unidentified persons when they had their annual medical check up and taking urine samples as required by laws.
<b>2006</b>	Jan 19	Four ex-GP workers came to HK to protest against GP
	March 24	Five ex-GP workers, with local groups support, demonstrated against Mr. Victor Lo when he attended the board meeting of the University of HK Polytechnic.
	April 21	HK groups protested GP when it held its Special General Meeting.

Year	Month and Date	Events
	June 28	GP sued three HK groups for 'defamation'.
	July 11	Chong Chan Yau, former executive director of HK Oxfam, resigned from the GP Batteries Industrial Safety Fund to protest against GP suing HK groups,.
	August 31	The second batch of ex-GP workers (244 persons) lost the case.
	Oct 15	Shenzhen JetPower management offered a compensation scheme similar to Power Pack to JetPower workers on the condition that they had to resign within one month. On Oct 26 the workers staged a sit in strike to protest against the scheme.
	Early November	146 workers filed a court case against GP and demanded GP to provide annual medical checks according to law.
	Nov 18	3 ex-Power Pack and Advance Battery workers met with Victor Lo but their demands were not met
	Dec 10	CCTV's second program on GP incident which aroused more public attention and alerted the workers in the Wuxi Matsushita Battery, subsidiary of Panasonic, on the cadmium outbreak.
	Dec 26	3 workers' representatives of the lawsuit reached an agreement with GP and the latter need to provide workers with annual health checks required by law starting from mid-January 2007.
<b>2007</b>	Jan 4-9	Workers at Wuxi Matsushita Battery struck and demonstrated for several days to demand authentic laboratory investigation and were eventually repressed.
	Jan 16	The first group of GP workers had their annual health checks in Huizhou.

From exploited victims of globalisation to well-organised campaigners for compensation and safe working conditions, the journey of these employees at a multinational company is nothing short of inspiring. It takes the reader through China's official complaints system, the Bureau of Letters and Calls, to disciplined picket lines that briefly brought production at a major global battery factory to a halt.

It is a story of struggle, transformation and hope. Emerging from workshops thick with red clouds of poisonous cadmium oxide dust, come exhausted young women determined to change their fate and expose company disinformation on their deteriorating health. Despite official restrictions on organising and media access, these extraordinary workers demonstrate time and again the power of traditional trade union values: solidarity, determination and the importance of organised labour in protecting workers' rights against a predatory system. At the end of the day, the Gold Peak workers' story takes us back to basics. It is a timely reminder that ILO Conventions 87 and 98, on the rights to organise and to bargain collectively respectively, must be universally respected. I believe this book takes us a significant step closer to that goal.

*Agnes Jongerius*

President of the FNV (Netherlands Trade Union Confederation)

This chronology of a labour struggle documents an unprecedented empowerment process of dagongmei, female migrant labourers in China. Different from the mostly spontaneous, locally confined and short-lived protests and strikes in individual Chinese export factories, the women workers in three Gold Peak factories managed to organise a lasting struggle and plan a campaign. They turned themselves from victims of cadmium poisoning into subjects who claim their right to safe working conditions and occupational health. They crossed the boundary of silence and invisibility by going public and scandalising the case of health hazards and rights violation in the production of batteries for the world market. Women took leadership in a struggle which put them at a very high risk. They set a model for other factories and other migrant workers in China proving that even under the most adverse conditions workers' consciousness of resistance and collective struggle can evolve. Others will follow their example.

*Christa Wichterich*

German writer and expert on globalization and women



**Price: HK\$ 80 / US\$ 10 / EUR\$ 10**