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SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF LABOR IN CHINA

Lao-tung Pao-hu Kung-tso  
(Labor Safety and Protection Work)  
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[Comment: The following report showing the number of injuries and deaths resulting from industrial accidents in Shanghai and Nanking factories during 1950-1951 was taken from Chapter III of the book, Lao-tung Pao-hu Kung-tso]

The retention of the indifferent attitude of the old society toward the excessive hazards of laborers is very serious. Shortly after liberation, sections of plants and mines regarded labor safety seriously; however, many plants still continue to disregard this problem and serious conditions still exist. According to incomplete statistics on May-October 1950, industrial casualties in China caused 39 deaths and 629 injured; in the East China Administrative Area from June 1950 to February 1951, casualties numbered 6,057. From September 1950 to July 1951, there were 564 industrial accidents in 30 production plants in Shanghai resulting in 446 injured and 34 dead.


According to data from railway sources, there were 491,902 days of sick and accident leave (or 5.3 percent of the total working days) granted to workers during July, August, and September 1950 in the railways under the control of the four railway bureaus of the Northeast area (excluding the Ch'anch'un Railway), and in Tientsin, T'ai-yuan, and Shanghai.

These casualties are shocking! Our newspapers regularly uncovered and criticized industrial and mining injuries and fatalities, to arouse public interest. Various cases are cited below to illustrate safety conditions in industry.

On 21 April 1951, a nitration boiler exploded in the Shanghai Ta-chung Dye Factory because management had disregarded the safety of its employees. Ten workers, including Technicians Lang T'ung-wen and Chang Tsai-t'ai, and Workers Tu-ch'ih and Han Ch'ang-ch'uan were killed; in addition five men were injured. The nitration plant, furnace rooms, experimental plant, carpentry shop, and air chambers were destroyed. The explosion cost more than 700 million yuan and destroyed an area of 400 square meters. Incorrect techniques was one of the causes of the explosion. In the manufacturing of picric acid, an incorrect ratio of materials was used while the temperature gauge was inaccurate. As a result the picric acid congealed into blocks and could not be removed. The antiquated hazardous methods of using rod-irons to remove the acid produced friction and resulted in a powerful explosion. After the explosion, the management and the men responsible for the explosion were punished.

On 21 July 1951, in the China Silk Filature Company's second filature plant at Hai-ning, Chekiang, a woman worker died from working in a temperature of 150 degrees Fahrenheit. High workshop temperatures and the management's indifference toward working conditions and the life and safety of the workers were responsible for this death. Trade-union cadres who were not concerned with the suffering and feelings of the workers must also be held responsible.

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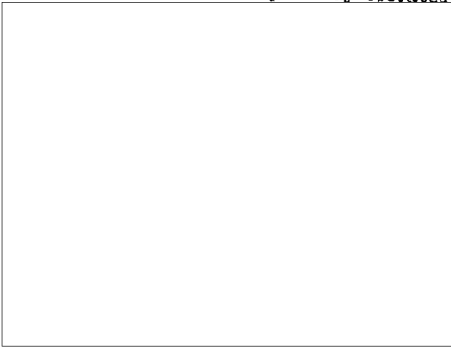
Tsingtao, Yen-t'ai, Tientsin, Kalgan, and other places have had recurring cases of poisoning among the workers transporting poisonous products. Tsingtao has the largest number of cases. Yen-t'ai has the second largest number and there have occurred eight consecutive cases of mass poisoning. A total of 870 workers were poisoned, and two died. What caused this type of accident? Primarily, the fact that during the time the trading agencies were transporting poisonous products they did not provide some means of protecting the workers. Some did not even inform the workers that the products were poisonous. For example, the cadres of the Nan ting branch of the Ch'ang-tien warehouse under the Shantung Office of East China Industrial Department labeled only some of the products poisonous. Because the workers did not have antidotes, some of them were poisoned. Following this incident, the cadres not only showed no sympathy to the workers, but even went so far as to ridicule them.

Occupational diseases in many plants are also very serious. For example, during June 1951 in the Nanking Hsin-ning Brick and Tile Factory, 382 workers, or more than 50 percent of the employees suffered from stomach aches, colds, anemia, and other illnesses.

The hygienic conditions of the workers' dormitories, dining halls, baths, and lavatories need attention and improvement. The workers in the Shanghai T'ien-kung Chemical Plant breathe sulfuric acid fumes 24 hours a day because their dormitories are adjacent to the plant. The Shanghai Hua-te Steel Refining Plant has seven men and 80 women using a single lavatory. One plant owner unreasonably refuses to improve the hygiene conditions in the plant, saying: "Bacteria do not have an agreement with men; who can guarantee anyone against illness?"

Working long shifts and excessive overtime also damage the workers' health and strength. The workers of Shanghai Ya-li Metal Plant work 16 hours regularly, and have no vacation. The Shanghai Municipal Printing Plant regularly increased the shifts and the overtime in order to complete its production quota; once increasing the shifts throughout the night and workers stayed on their jobs for 50 hours.

Generally speaking, working conditions are more serious in the small-privately operated enterprises than in the publicly operated enterprises.



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