



ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

**THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND WORKER RIGHTS IN CHINA:
WHAT HAS THE RECESSION DONE TO PROSPECTS
FOR TRUE WORKER REPRESENTATION?**

June 7-8, 2009
Washington Court Hotel
525 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Sunday, June 7th
Atrium Ballroom

6:00 pm *Reception*

6:30 pm *Dinner*

CHINA'S POLICY RESPONSE TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS: AN OVERVIEW

Gordon Chang, *Author and Journalist*

The global economic crisis has overturned economic development models, thrown the world economy into deep recession, and created terrible hardship for millions of workers. How has the crisis affected China, whose meteoric economic rise has stirred fascination, greed and anxiety around the world? Many commentators have remarked on the communist regime's resilience and flexibility while riding the rocket of historic growth. Will the regime be able to manage its way through the worst economic downturn, perhaps since the Great Depression. This session will explore the challenges posed by the crisis

Monday, June 8th
Atrium Ballroom

8:30 am *Continental Breakfast*

9:00 am **CHINESE WORKERS, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND THE FINANCIAL CRISIS:
TIME OF OPPORTUNITY?**

Han Dongfang, *Director, China Labour Bulletin*

In a country where political repression is sophisticated and unrelenting, and independent unions are banned, how can workers protect their interests at the workplace? Can genuine collective bargaining, the traditional tool of unions in democratic societies, exist in China? A growing number of activists argue that the widening “space” for action that now exists in the China has opened a door for the process that is often called an “incubator of democracy”. In this session, we will discuss what has changed in China, what is being done in the realm of collective bargaining already, and how the financial crisis will almost certainly have an impact on these developments.

Discussion

10:30 am *Break*

10:45 am **THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE LABOR CONTRACT LAW 18 MONTHS LATER: SUCCESS, FAILURE OR NON SEQUITUR?**

Earl Brown, *Labor and Employment Law Counsel, & China Program Director, Solidarity Center, AFL-CIO*

Virginia Emily Ho, *Visiting Assistant Professor, Indiana University Maurer School of Law*

The passage of the labor contract law 18 months created a bubbling up of optimism in some quarters about the potential for at least a limited liberalization affecting the rights of workers, a recognized voice for workers on the job, an improved and fairer labor dispute mechanism, and a greater voice for workers on the job generally. In this session, we will examine what has happened since the law was approved, in the context of the financial crisis.

12:15 pm *Luncheon*

CHARTER 08: A REPORT AND A CRITIQUE

Xiaorong Li, *Professor, Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy University of Maryland*

Charter 08, signed by more than two thousand Chinese citizens, was conceived and written in conscious admiration of the founding of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, at the height of communist repression there, The Chinese document calls for more than ameliorative reform of the current political system, but for an end to some of its essential features, including one-party rule, and their replacement with a system based on human rights and democracy, including specifically the right of freedom of association and the right to strike. In this session, we will discuss Charter 08, its impact and its meaning at this moment.

1:30 pm **CORRUPTION AND ITS IMPACT ON WORKER RIGHTS, AND LABOR REFORM AT THE GRASSROOTS**

Yan Sun, Professor, *Professor, Political Science, City University of New York Graduate Center and Queens College*

Corruption, from the grassroots to the highest levels of government, has a long history in China. Employer and local government corruption has been the cause of many of the most bitter labor disputes in the country over the years. Today, some observers argue that corruption, fueled by the economic boom, has reached such a level that it may threaten the stability of the state. Others note the very public and vocal attacks on corruption by China's top rulers and argue that the picture is far more complex than more pessimistic commentators believe. In this session, we will explore the topic of corruption, its impact on workers and Chinese society.

2:30 p.m. ***Wrap-up Discussion***

Leo Casey, Vice President, *United Federation of Teachers*

The global financial crisis has created a climate of profound change in China and throughout the world. Is an inside focus on collective bargaining and basic union skills the best approach to democratic change in China today? What is the best way to leverage outside pressure for inside gain? We will explore these issues and any other observations from seminar participants.

