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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION



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INTRODUCTION



HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION: A MAP TO A MOVEMENT'S FUTURE

Lucia Nader (Executive Director, Conectas)
Juana Kweitel (Program Director, Conectas)
Marcos Fuchs (Associate Director, Conectas)

Sur Journal was created ten years ago as a vehicle to deepen and strengthen bonds between academics and activists from the Global South concerned with human rights, in order to magnify their voices and their participation before international organizations and academia. Our main motivation was the fact that, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, academics were working alone and there was very little exchange between researchers from different countries. The journal's aim has been to provide individuals and organizations working to defend human rights with research, analyses and case studies that combine academic rigor and practical interest. In many ways, these lofty ambitions have been met with success: in the past decade, we have published articles from dozens of countries on issues as diverse as health and access to treatment, transitional justice, regional mechanisms and information and human rights, to name a few. Published in three languages and available online and in print for free, our project also remains unique in terms of geographical reach, critical perspective and its Southern 'accent'. In honour of the founding editor of this journal, **Pedro Paulo Poppovic**, the 20th issue opens with a biography (by João Paulo Charleaux) of this sociologist who has been one of the main contributors to this publication's success.

This past decade has also been, in many ways, a successful one for the human rights movement as a whole. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has recently turned 60, new international treaties have been adopted and the old but good global and regional monitoring systems are in full operation, despite criticisms regarding their effectiveness and attempts by States to curb their authority. From a strategic perspective, we continue to use, with more or less success, advocacy, litigation and naming-and-shaming as our main tools for change. In addition, we continue to nurture partnerships between what we categorize as local, national and international organizations within our movement.

Nevertheless, the **political and geographic coordinates** under which the global human

rights movement has operated have undergone profound changes. Over the past decade, we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets to protest against social and political injustices. We have also seen emerging powers from the South play an increasingly influential role in the definition of the global human rights agenda. Additionally, the past ten years have seen the rapid growth of social networks as a tool of mobilization and as a privileged forum for sharing political information between users. In other words, the journal is publishing its 20th issue against a backdrop that is very different from that of ten years ago. The protests that recently filled the streets of many countries around the globe, for example, were not organized by traditional social movements nor by unions or human rights NGOs, and people's grievances, more often than not, were expressed in terms of social justice and not as rights. Does this mean that human rights are no longer seen as an effective language for producing social change? Or that human rights organizations have lost some of their ability to represent wronged citizens? Emerging powers themselves, despite their newly-acquired international influence, have hardly been able – or willing – to assume stances departing greatly from those of “traditional” powers. How and where can human rights organizations advocate for change? Are Southern-based NGOs in a privileged position to do this? Are NGOs from emerging powers also gaining influence in international forums?

It was precisely to reflect upon these and other pressing issues that, for this 20th issue, SUR's editors decided to enlist the help of over 50 leading human rights activists and academics from 18 countries, from Ecuador to Nepal, from China to the US. We asked them to ponder on what we saw as some of the most urgent and relevant questions facing the global human rights movement today: 1. Who do we represent? 2. How do we combine urgent issues with long-term impacts? 3. Are human rights still an effective language for producing social change? 4. How have new information and communication technologies influenced activism? 5. What are the challenges of working internationally from the South?

The result, which you now hold in your hands, is a **roadmap for the global human rights movement** in the 21st century – it offers a vantage point from which it is possible to observe where the movement stands today and where it is heading. The first stop is a reflection on these issues by the founding directors of Conectas Human Rights, **Oscar Vilhena Vieira and Malak El-Chichini Poppovic**. The roadmap then goes on to include **interviews and articles**, both providing in-depth analyses of human rights issues, as well as **notes from the field**, more personalized accounts of experiences working with human rights, which we have organized into **six categories**, although most of them could arguably be allocated to more than one category:

Language. In this section, we have included articles that ponder the question of whether human rights – as a utopia, as norms and as institutions – are still effective for producing social change. Here, the contributions range from analyses on human rights as a language for change (**Stephen Hoggood and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro**), empirical research on the use of the language of human rights for articulating grievances in recent mass protests (**Sara Burke**), to reflections on the standard-setting role and effectiveness of international human rights institutions (**Raquel Rolnik, Vinodh Jaichand and Emílio**

Álvarez Icaza). It also includes studies on the movement's global trends (**David Petrusek**), challenges to the movement's emphasis on protecting the rule of law (**Kumi Naidoo**), and strategic proposals to better ensure a compromise between utopianism and realism in relation to human rights (**Samuel Moyn**).

Themes. Here we have included contributions that address specific human rights topics from an original and critical standpoint. Four themes were analysed: economic power and corporate accountability for human rights violations (**Phil Bloomer, Janet Love and Gonzalo Berrón**); sexual politics and LGBTI rights (**Sonia Corrêa, Gloria Careaga Pérez and Arvind Narrain**); migration (**Diego Lorente Pérez de Eulate**); and, finally, transitional justice (**Clara Sandoval**).

Perspectives. This section encompasses country-specific accounts, mostly field notes from human rights activists on the ground. Those contributions come from places as diverse as Angola (**Maria Lúcia da Silveira**), Brazil (**Ana Valéria Araújo**), Cuba (**María-Ileana Faguaga Iglesias**), Indonesia (**Haris Azhar**), Mozambique (**Salvador Nkamate**) and Nepal (**Mandira Sharma**). But they all share a critical perspective on human rights, including for instance a sceptical perspective on the relation between litigation and public opinion in Southern Africa (**Nicole Fritz**), a provocative view of the democratic future of China and its relation to labour rights (**Han Dongfang**), and a thoughtful analysis of the North-South duality from Northern Ireland (**Maggie Beirne**).

Voices. Here the articles go to the core of the question of whom the global human rights movement represents. **Adrian Gurza Lavalle** and **Juana Kweitel** take note of the pluralisation of representation and innovative forms of accountability adopted by human rights NGOs. Others study the pressure for more representation or a louder voice in international human rights mechanisms (such as in the Inter-American system, as reported by **Mario Melo**) and in representative institutions such as national legislatures (as analysed by **Pedro Abramovay and Heloisa Griggs**). Finally, **Chris Grove**, as well as **James Ron, David Crow and Shannon Golden** emphasize, in their contributions, the need for a link between human rights NGOs and grassroots groups, including economically disadvantaged populations. As a counter-argument, **Fateh Azzam** questions the need of human rights activists to represent anyone, taking issue with the critique of NGOs as being overly dependent on donors. Finally, **Mary Lawlor and Andrew Anderson** provide an account of a Northern organization's efforts to attend to the needs of local human rights defenders as they, and only they, define them.

Tools. In this section, the editors included contributions that focus on the instruments used by the global human rights movement to do its work. This includes a debate on the role of technology in promoting change (**Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul**, as well as **Sopheap Chak and Miguel Pulido Jiménez**) and perspectives on the challenges of human rights campaigning, analysed provocatively by **Martin Kirk** and **Fernand Alphen** in their respective contributions. Other articles point to the need of organizations to be more grounded in local contexts, as noted by **Ana Paula Hernández** in relation to Mexico, by **Louis Bickford** in what he sees as a convergence towards the global middle, and finally by **Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and Anna Turley** in their movement-support model. In addition, it is noted by **Mary Kaldor** that NGOs are not the same as civil society,

properly understood. Furthermore, litigation and international work are cast in a critical light by **Sandra Carvalho and Eduardo Baker** in relation to the dilemma between long and short term strategies in the Inter-American system. Finally, **Gastón Chillier and Pétalla Brandão Timo** analyse South-South cooperation from the viewpoint of a national human rights NGO in Argentina.

Multipolarity. Here, the articles challenge our ways of thinking about power in the multipolar world we currently live in, with contributions from the heads of some of the world's largest international human rights organizations based in the North (**Kenneth Roth** and **Salil Shetty**) and in the South (**Lucia Nader, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah** and **Mandeep Tiwana**). This section also debates what multipolarity means in relation to States (**Emilie M. Hafner-Burton**), international organizations and civil society (**Louise Arbour**) and businesses (**Mark Malloch-Brown**).

Conectas hopes this issue will foster debate on the future of the global human rights movement in the 21st century, enabling it to reinvent itself as necessary to offer better protection of human rights on the ground.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this issue of Sur Journal was made possible by the support of the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Oak Foundation, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Additionally, Conectas Human Rights is especially grateful for the collaboration of the authors and the hard work of the Journal's editorial team. We are also extremely thankful for the work of Maria Brant and Manoela Miklos for conceiving this Issue and for conducting most of the interviews, and for Thiago Amparo for joining the editorial team and making this Issue possible. We are also tremendously thankful for Luz González's tireless work with editing the contributions received, and for Ana Cernov for coordinating the overall editorial process.



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Human Rights in Motion

Perspectives

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Human Rights Litigation in Southern Africa: Not Easily Able to Discount Prevailing Public Opinion

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INTERVIEW WITH MARÍA-I. FAGUAGA IGLESIAS

"The Particularities in Cuba Are Not Always Identified nor Understood by Human Rights Activists from Other Countries"



HAN DONGFANG

Han Dongfang is the founder and director of China Labour Bulletin (CLB), an organization that seeks to defend and promote the rights of workers in China. He has been a leading advocate for workers' rights in China for more than two decades since helping to form China's first independent trade union during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. He plays a leading role in guiding and directing CLB's overall development.

ABSTRACT

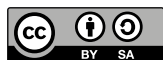
The article briefly reviews the development of the workers' movement in China over the last two decades, and the evolution of the *China Labour Bulletin's* (CLB) role in defending workers' rights and promoting workplace democracy. By sustaining that collective bargaining is the best way to promote dialogue and resolve labour disputes, the author addresses the criticism that such an approach would not be viable given the lack of independent trade unions in China. In conclusion, he argues that, in the long-run, the Chinese Communist Party will have no option but to form an alliance with the workers' movement, and that this alliance will in turn allow the Party to transform itself from an authoritarian, highly centralised institution into a broadly social-democratic party that tolerates and appreciates the development of grassroots democracy and civil society.

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Collective bargaining system – China – Communist Party – Workers' rights



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ESSAY

A VISION OF CHINA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Han Dongfang

Nearly a decade after the Orange Revolution, Ukraine is still struggling with democracy. It was obvious to me back in 2008, when I visited Kiev for a meeting of the World Movement for Democracy, that this country, which had been hailed three years earlier as an example of peaceful protest and democratic change, had not yet fully embraced democratic values. On arrival at the airport, the Ukrainian border control agents selected every single black person from our delegation and made them stand in a special line for processing.

This shocked me into thinking again about the definition of democracy. Is it an end in and of itself or a journey, a process that can help solve problems in the daily lives of ordinary people? Since 1997, I have been talking to ordinary Chinese workers on my Radio Free Asia radio show about their very real and pressing problems. These very personal interactions had no room for political slogans. Those workers focused on finding solutions within the existing system. And this brought me to the realisation that democracy is not just about presidential elections and political banners. It is not an event that happens every four years or so, it is a constantly evolving process that involves everyone in society. It is, I believe, a process by which social inequality is eroded and through which different interest groups can resolve their differences by peaceful dialogue and compromise. It is important to ask: Aside from elections, what can we do? And, before elections, what can we do to cultivate the spirit of democracy?

In this brief article, I will attempt to address these questions by focussing specifically on the work of China Labour Bulletin (CLB) as part of the wider struggle for democracy and human rights in China. CLB started out in 1994 as a newsletter reporting on and exposing incidents of labour rights violations in China. But in 2002, we at CLB decided to not just report the news but to get actively involved in it. We established a legal assistance program that would allow workers to seek redress for rights violations through legal and judicial process. In fact, many of the cases I discussed on my radio show eventually became our legal cases. However, we immediately encountered an embarrassing ideological and political problem. Providing legal assistance to workers might reduce the anger felt towards the ultimate cause of those rights violations – the Communist

Party. Even if the worker was not successful, the process could still allow them to see legitimacy in a non-democratic system and thus inadvertently bolster the Communist regime. You could say that working inside the system in this way is a bit like pretending to criticise people while actually supporting them.

In spite of all the challenges involved in providing legal assistance to workers in need, we resolved to continue based on the logic that enforcing existing legal standards was in itself substantial progress. Moreover, regardless of whether or not legal actions are successful, they can help highlight important legal issues and stimulate discussion about legal reform. Gradually, more and more workers will be aware of the law and use it to seek redress. This will then enhance the self-confidence of other workers seeking to defend their rights. Put another way, even though it has limited impact in promoting democracy, providing legal assistance to workers can at least promote the rule of law and create momentum for change.

Concerning occupational diseases, for example, it used to be the case that before workers could get an official diagnosis of the deadly lung disease pneumoconiosis, their employer had to issue a certificate saying that they were employed in a high dust environment. Even if a regular hospital diagnosed the disease, the occupational disease clinic would not sign off on the diagnosis without that certificate from the employer. To make matters worse, the vast majority of workers with pneumoconiosis were miners and construction workers who never had an employment contract and who were often fired after they contracted the disease, making it very difficult for them to prove they had an employment relationship. Of course, it would be very easy to lay the blame for all these problems at the door of the Communist Party but instead, in 2008, we started to help those workers with pneumoconiosis who had been refused a diagnosis by occupational disease clinics to sue their employer in both the civil and criminal courts, sue the local authorities for nonfeasance, and to sue the clinics and the employer for conspiracy to commit fraud. The courts rejected most of these cases and, of those that were accepted, the vast majority were unsuccessful. However, we never gave up and have so far filed dozens of pneumoconiosis-related lawsuits in 13 different provinces all across China.

Since these pneumoconiosis cases focused on purely legal and economic issues, the Chinese media was able to get involved and report on them at length. This media coverage generated a lot of public discussion on who should be responsible for workers who have contracted occupational diseases, and this public debate helped put even more pressure on the government to change the law. Eventually, in 2011, the Ministry of Health did amend its *Occupational Disease Diagnosis Regulations* and removed the need for workers to get a certificate from their employer saying they were employed in a high dust environment, as well as provide proof of an employment relationship. In some provinces, the local government even took an extra step by covering workers' medical expenses and paying them subsistence allowances. Although these changes are nothing compared to what the workers should be entitled to, they still illustrate how individual cases, whether they are won or lost, can put pressure on the government.

Furthermore, these pneumoconiosis cases have also helped in the development of civil society in China. Love Save Pneumoconiosis, a voluntary organisation that was established by a renowned journalist a few years ago, has, for example, grown rapidly and now acts as a showcase for the increasing awareness and activism of ordinary people across China. It has helped push the boundaries of such civil society organisations well beyond simple charity. It has set up several regional centres across China and developed a high-profile nationwide network that delivers practical help to those in need and lobbies the central government in Beijing for change.

But despite the success we have had in getting compensation for workers and changing laws, it was obvious from the very beginning that there were simply too many labour rights violations for any organisation to deal with. So what could we do? Again, we decided not to take the easy way out and just blame the Party for everything. Instead, we actively looked for practical remedies on the ground; how to prevent rights violations in the first place, how to save lives, how to save judicial resources and how to develop systematic and long-term solutions.

One thing I have learnt after two decades of work in the Chinese labour movement, whilst in semi-exile in Hong Kong, is that there are only two situations in which highlighting the failings of government makes any sense: in an absolute dictatorship and in a democracy. As should be clear from the examples above, China is somewhere in between those two points. It is an authoritarian regime but it is also subject to public pressure. And that is why it is important to stay positive and look for workable solutions.

In 2005, around the same time as the World Trade Organisation held a meeting in Hong Kong, CLB held its own seminar in which we announced a new program that had the potential to nip all labour rights violations in the bud. The centrepiece of that program was the promotion of a collective bargaining system in Chinese factories. I still remember the disbelieving grins and wishes of “good luck” from my friends in labour rights groups and trade unions at that meeting. Back then, no one saw the possibility of setting up a collective bargaining system under the Chinese Communist Party regime that denies workers the right to free association, and my wild thinking cost me a number of friends in the international labour movement; friends who had been very supportive ever since 1989 and whose friendship I valued a lot.

I understood completely why they were so sceptical; at that time, the Communist regime, scared of an anti-government Polish Solidarity-type movement developing in China, was routinely sentencing workers’ leaders to long jail terms. But it seemed to me that one way to prevent more worker activists and strike leaders from being thrown in jail was to establish a mechanism that could resolve disputes between labour and management peacefully and at the same time get the government off the hook. Those striking workers who had been arrested by the Communist regime in the early 2000s had not been asking for political change. They had only asked for their economic grievances to be resolved. Those grievances were related to fundamental livelihood issues like having enough food on the table for their family and as such they could never be

eradicated by political suppression. Moreover, as the Chinese economy liberalised and developed and became more firmly integrated into the world economy, labour rights issues became much less problematic for the government. We reasoned that the government's repression of workers' rights could not last and that a new opportunity for the workers' movement would open up if we could take the initiative to de-politicise labour issues. In other words, at this important juncture, when the Party was beginning to realise that its previous position on the workers' movement was misguided, should we continue to highlight the political nature of workers' rights or focus on the basic economic issues of how to ensure that workers get their fair share of the wealth they help to create?

However, back in 2005, this idea was absolutely politically incorrect. People could easily point fingers at us and say CLB had been brainwashed by the Chinese Communist Party, or even that CLB is selling out the workers and is undermining the Chinese labour movement! From every aspect, it seemed that our new approach was political suicide. Again I understood the accusations but I was certain that the need for a collective bargaining system is driven by fundamental demands on the factory floor. After all, collective bargaining is not just good for the workers; it benefits the employer and the government as well, creating a triple win for the parties involved. In the long term, no matter if it is in China or the rest of the world, in an autocratic regime or in a democracy, a healthy labour-management relationship is absolutely necessary and can only be sustained on the grounds of equality and mutual respect. Regardless of the consequences for CLB, we stuck to our beliefs and never shied away from explaining them to government leaders, policy makers, trade unionists, labour activists, academics and journalists. Later, collective bargaining did become widely discussed and was even touted as a possible win-win-win solution to the problems inherent in labour relations in China.

Then in May 2010, not long before the Arab Spring, workers all over China showed the world that they were ready for change. It started at a Honda auto-parts factory in Guangdong, when several hundred employees went on strike to demand a wage increase (MITCHELL; SOBLE, 2010). Although the workers were successful and their demands were basically met, the dispute was actually resolved by intellectuals and public figures brought in from the outside rather than the workers themselves. In other words, although the strike was initiated by the workers it was resolved by people with a 'higher social status'. People may ask, why didn't the government just deploy the police to smash the strike rather than send in these outsiders to broker a deal? I don't know, and I don't want to speculate on why. All I do know is that the government did so and it seemed to work. At CLB, we saw this as a historical moment and as an opportunity to move forward. It was clear that not only were the workers ready to move forward, the government was also ready for change.

The following year there was another important development. Several hundred workers at a Citizen Watch factory in Shenzhen (THE DEVELOPMENT..., 2012) went out on strike and this time they democratically elected their own representatives, engaged in collective bargaining with management, and

successfully negotiated their own settlement. The workers had a long-standing grievance related to the non-payment of overtime from 2005 to 2010. During that period, management did not include the employees' daily 40-minute break as part of their normal working hours and refused to pay overtime until employees had made up the 'lost' 40 minutes. The strike failed to resolve the issue, so the workers hired a local law firm that specialised in collective bargaining to work for them and help them negotiate a deal with management. After a week of face-to-face negotiations, on 17 November 2011, the workers agreed to a management offer to pay 70 percent of the overtime arrears. At this time, one of questions most commonly asked in the media coverage of this case was "Where is the trade union?"

Again, it is worth noting that we could have simply focused on the fact it was the Communist Party that had created the conditions that allowed Citizen to exploit the workers and cheat them out of their overtime. There would be no political risk for us in taking this approach – condemning both capitalists and Communists – but we took the politically incorrect approach of working inside the system to find a solution. After all, these abuses by trans-national corporations happen all over the world in democracies as well as autocracies. The political system is not the only issue; the immediate issue in China's case is finding a solution to real problems on the ground – even if we have to put politics to one side for a while and just focus on day-to-day economics.

The bad news is that soon after the collective bargaining deal at Citizen, the worker representatives were sacked, so you may think it was all for nothing but, for us, all this did was highlight the issue that every labour movement faces, namely how to protect workers' leaders and keep the momentum of the healthy dialogue going. So the fight continues. In more recent cases in Shenzhen (SHENZHEN..., 2014) and Guangzhou (WORKERS'..., 2014) we now have a situation where several workers have been prosecuted by the authorities for their protest actions. And again you may well see this as yet another example of government repression but if you look at the support these workers have received from their co-workers and labour rights groups in Guangdong, you will see that workers are now ready to stand up and push forward a strong and vibrant workers' movement in China.

In Chinese the word for "crisis" (危机) consists of two characters, "danger" and "opportunity." This ancient wisdom emphasises that there are two sides to everything. In any situation you can focus on the dark side or the light side. We at CLB always try to see the positives, and grasp opportunity when it arises. As noted above, the Citizen strike and the collective bargaining that followed raised a very important question: Where is the trade union? Everyone in China knows that the trade union is controlled by the Party and protected by the Party. The leaders of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions sit on high chairs far away from ordinary workers. But after the Citizen case, the local trade union federation in Shenzhen could no longer stand the heat and in mid-2012 it decided to show it really was on the workers' side when it got involved in a strike at the Japanese-owned Ohms electronics factory in the city and then arranged a democratic election at the factory union (RAMZY, 2012). The federation chairman

publicly stated that the union is a workers' organisation and it should be elected by the workers themselves. This proclamation tied the issues of strikes, collective bargaining, and the role of trade unions altogether, so much so that today strikes are no longer taboo for the official trade union, and more and more workers are asking for democratic union elections.

It is important to note that such statement did not come from some dissident like me. They came from a leader of an official trade union. And it does matter. It gives the official trade union the chance to do something good for the workers, while the result of that action is good for the bosses and the government too. In addition to supporting the trade union, when necessary, we have also supported the government, as was the case when we published a half-page advertisement (CHINA..., 2010) in a major Hong Kong paper entitled "Support Guangdong's efforts to establish a collective wage negotiation system: a win for labour, employers and the government". The advertisement was a response to attempts by Hong Kong business owners to derail a bill in the Guangdong legislature that would have given workers and management the chance to negotiate pay and working conditions on the basis of equality and mutual respect. So yes, we openly supported the legislation proposed by the Communist Party-controlled Guangdong government because in this case the intended legislative change would benefit everyone concerned and again because by doing so it would help us to focus on solving the labour problems on the ground, rather than on party politics.

During the past decade, CLB's strategies have changed in response to and in accordance with the shifting landscape of the labour relations in China. We did not follow any political agenda, we looked at what was happening on the ground and acted accordingly, grasping opportunities as and when they arose, identifying the path to follow and sticking to that path. Looking back, we were lucky enough to push the right button at the right time before the opportunity to do so vanished. Looking to the future, I am sure many more people will disagree with me, but I am confident that we will have other opportunities like this. On the road ahead, I can see the Chinese Communist Party transforming into a broadly social-democratic party and see social-democratic values becoming the mainstream. In other words, China will become the developing world's version of Europe's Nordic countries.

Why do I think this could possibly happen? Over the last decade or so, we have seen the dramatic rise of the workers' movement in China. Workers have shaken off the mantle of victims and emerged as a strong, determined and increasingly active collective force. We have also seen the Communist Party move away from the blind pursuit of economic growth and focus much more on resolving basic livelihood issues, raising incomes and tackling social inequality as a way of strengthening its own political legitimacy. In the future, in order to further realise its goals, I believe the Party will eventually have to forge an alliance with the workers' movement. To many, this will be an outrageous suggestion. Some will ask how I could even dare suggest it. Well, if it is necessary, if such an alliance can help facilitate the peaceful transition to a better regime and a better country, then why not say it, and, more importantly, why not do it?

It is not about whether Party officials are nice people or not. It is simply that I believe that it is in the Party's interest to form an alliance with the workers' movement. And there are signs that the new leaders of the Party and government recognise this too. They have made it clear in recent policy statements (CHINA'S OFFICIAL..., 2013) that one of their top priorities is to improve the standard of living of ordinary workers and that moreover it is the responsibility of the trade unions to make that happen. It is difficult to see why there should be any conflict between the workers and the Party on this issue, either in the short-term or in the long-run. A strong worker-led trade union that can negotiate better pay and working conditions on the ground is obviously good for the Party in that it contributes to its stated goals. Moreover, workers need political muscle or backup to make sure their interests are protected and promoted by the government. If you think about, the basic language of the Party and the workers is the same; it is only out-dated political blinkers that prevent us from seeing that.

In the long-run, an alliance between the workers' movement and the Party will help to raise living standards and enhance social justice. It will also allow the Party to transform itself from an authoritarian, highly centralized institution into a broadly social-democratic party that tolerates and appreciates the development of grassroots democracy and civil society. I believe it is inevitable that the Communist Party will eventually split into two camps, those who believe in law of the jungle and those who believe in social democracy. And the only way for the social-democratic camp to prevail is if it allies itself with the workers. This might seem fanciful but if you look at the values of traditional Chinese culture that stress the importance of social equality, you will see how they can be aligned with ideals of social democracy. These values have emerged in political movements throughout Chinese history but sadly, they have always been smashed and corrupted by violent revolution. But the situation is different now. The Cold War ended a quarter of century ago and the world is no longer divided into different political camps. On the contrary, it is now intimately connected through trade and commerce and shared economic interests. The over-politicised and partisan discourse of the Cold War has little relevance today. I believe the Chinese Communist Party recognises this too and will have to get ready to embrace social democratic values, not because it is the politically correct thing to do but simply because it is in its interests to do so. Allowing China's hundreds of millions of workers to share in the fruits of 35 years of economic development is good for China and good for the Party. The alternative scenario, where political suppression is the norm, where might is right, does not bear thinking about. It would be a catastrophe, not only for China but for the whole world if its second largest economy becomes another Russia. No one knows for sure how the democratic process will unfold in China but one thing is for sure: the process is already underway and we have no choice but to get involved.

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