

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

This Week in the Chinese Blogosphere Week Ending 17 December 2010 (U//FOUO)

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Common Themes (U)

During the week ending 17 December 2010, Chinese bloggers were most interested in the following topics:

- *Netizens Unite to Condemn Sale of Mentally Retarded Workers into Slavery:* Public reaction in the blogosphere and in traditional media to the story of 12 mentally retarded men who were sold into slavery to work in a factory almost certainly affected the quick government response.
- *Netizens Skeptical of Draft Revisions to Laws on Land Seizures and Forced Relocations:* Netizens expressed skepticism about draft State Council regulations that would increase legal protections for property owners and curb a growing number of violent protests involving land seizures and evictions.
- *Convicted Provincial Official Draws Netizen Support:* A former provincial official convicted of bribery drew Netizen support again after he was sentenced to 13 years in prison, as most bloggers thought his offenses were relatively minor. (U//FOUO)

Netizens Unite to Condemn Sale of Mentally Retarded Workers into Slavery (U)

Netizens expressed rage and despondence after learning about the plight of 12 mentally retarded men from Sichuan province who were sold into slavery to work at a building materials plant in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. According to traditional news media reports, the operators of an unlicensed aid agency for the disabled in Sichuan signed contracts for the men to work at the facility. The story became an overnight sensation in the blogosphere after its first appearance in traditional news media. Netizens were especially riveted by images of the men's grueling working conditions. Xinjiang public security officers arrested the plant's managers and Communist Party officials disciplined several local Party officials. The public reaction resulting from the story's

popularity in the blogosphere as well as in traditional media almost certainly had an effect on the quick government response. (U//FOUO)



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These images of mentally retarded workers became synonymous with the story in the blogosphere. (U)

The controversy over the mentally retarded workers set off a passionate discussion in the blogosphere on such topics as the treatment of disabled people in society and the role officials play in allowing workers to be exploited in private enterprises. Netizens also raised the role of an investigative news media, whose efforts in this case won praise. Blogger Fei Zhulituan and many others saluted the news media for exposing the plight of the workers; he wrote, “We rely on the media to enforce the law, because it was the media that exposed this inhumane incident of mentally retarded indentured laborers tortured by ruthless employers, [rather than law enforcement].” (U//FOUO)

Blogger Xiaokan Rensheng’s post on Sina.com was one of the most recommended on blog aggregator Web sites. He used the incident to question the government’s implicit role in the

exploitation: “It seems as if this factory is located on another planet. That’s why all the ‘relevant government departments’ did not know anything about it...Who allowed these mentally retarded people to become ‘indentured laborers?’ Who’s responsible for this? I don’t need to say anything. You know.” Two of the most popular comments on a special Netease.com discussion page about the incident read: “The people who inflict the most pain and suffering on Chinese people are always fellow Chinese!” Commenter Mars wrote, “I strongly demand that the local officials responsible for protecting [the employer] or refusing to do anything to be punished severely.” Many bloggers and commenters were reminded of other cases of slave labor in China. Many compared the incident in Xinjiang to a news story in 2007 that reported about thousands of workers being forced into slave labor at brick kilns in several provinces. (U//FOUO)

Netizens Skeptical of Draft Revisions to Laws on Land Seizures and Forced Relocations (U)

Netizens expressed skepticism about draft regulations released in mid-December by the State Council that would amend several land and property laws to increase legal protections for property owners. The proposed revisions seek to curb a growing number of sometimes violent protests involving land seizures and evictions. The revisions propose that courts rather than local governments control orders for forced evictions, and also set increased rates of compensation for land taken for government use. Public anger about government land seizures has often been centered on the “nail-house” phenomenon --residents who refuse to sell their homes finding their properties physically isolated and ultimately razed. Netizens have criticized the perceived collusion between local governments and property developers. (U//FOUO)

Blogger Liu Xiaoyuan doubted that new procedures would change the abuse of power by local governments or rampant corruption. He explained his view that, while the new regulations move power to the judiciary, judges are not independent, and thus three groups henceforth will be at the table: local governments, property developers, and the courts. All will “make a meal” out of hapless residents, Liu asserted. Blogger Ma Guangyuan agreed that the revisions would not improve the situation because increasing the number of regulations only increases the number of government tools available to evict residents. Blogger Zhang Tianwei disagreed and argued that, although the new law was not perfect, it allows for a more systematic airing of grievances and a public forum to draw attention to abuses of power. (U//FOUO)

Many Netizens agreed with the intent and general policies of the proposed revisions, but felt the legal details are still vague and open to abuse. Blogger Ye Tan noted that while requiring an appraiser to make a recommendation of compensation is good, the appraiser would be drawn from local government staff, which may work against owners. Ye also noted that another clause, which stipulated that 90 percent of an area’s residents must agree to the eviction order, does not specify who is a resident or who would determine the “public interest.” After reading the legal details, an anonymous commenter responded, “All laws are tools for the ruling party to govern the poor and peasants. For the common people, government is just like a devil’s sword.” (U//FOUO)

Convicted Provincial Official Draws Netizen Support (U)

A former provincial official drew Netizen attention for the second time in 2010 after he was sentenced on 14 December to 13 years imprisonment for accepting bribes. Netizen discussion of the punishment given to Han Feng, a former director of the Tobacco Sales Bureau in Guangxi province,

was strikingly similar to the online reaction in March when he was arrested.^a In both instances, online discussion generally played down Han's crimes and lauded him as a "good official."
(U//FOUO)

Han first gained online notoriety in March when his personal diary, which detailed his sexual encounters as well as the bribes he accepted, was posted online in late February. Netizens supported Han and argued that his crimes were relatively benign when compared to most local-level corruption. (U//FOUO)

Netizens continued to support Han after he was sentenced. Prosecutors released information in mid-December reporting that Han accepted about \$10,500 (RMB 69,500) in bribes in 2007 and 2008. Many Netizens argued that officials are not usually disciplined for a "five figure" amount of bribes, and asserted that it is virtually impossible for local officials to avoid taking bribes. Netizens on a Netease forum argued that Han should not be disciplined for his extramarital affairs, since "chasing women is a private matter." Other Netizens claimed that officials used Han's high profile case to set an example and scare other local officials away from accepting bribes. (U//FOUO)

More from China's Blogosphere (U)

Each week we analyze two or more topics from among many in the Chinese blogosphere. The following topics also were popular this week; we provide a link or links for our readers to learn more.

- Most Netizens were encouraged by the news that students in Shanghai scored best in the Program for International Student Assessment test, which compares the performance of 15-year-olds from 60 nations in math and science. Some Netizens, however, expressed skepticism about the results. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_49b4861301017qmf.html]
- Bloggers interested international affairs closely followed Premier Wen Jiabao's state visit to India. [<http://hi.baidu.com/%B0%D9%C4%D4%D7%DF%CF%F2%CA%C0%BD%E7/blog/item/06ec4757f61da38db495d.html>]
- Many Chinese Netizens continue to follow and comment on the legal case of Wikileaks.org founder Julian Assange. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_500768bd0100o9zn.html]
- Netizens expressed concern about mental illness and school violence after a gruesome stabbing at a middle school dormitory in Yunnan province in which a student killed two dorm mates. [<http://blog.163.com/xzhiw1234@126/blog/static/1660795722010111543246137/>] (U//FOUO)

^a See previously published CIA DI 10-01585, *This Week in the Chinese Blogosphere – Week Ending 5 March 2010* (U//FOUO). (U//FOUO)