

A CHRONOLOGY OF UNREST

The Ministry of Public Security last June reported that there were more than 58,000 “mass incidents”—the official term for public protests—involving three million people in 2003, an increase of almost 15 percent over the number of incidents reported the year before.¹ The ministry cited wage disputes, social welfare problems, the restructuring of state-owned enterprises and evictions as the main causes of protest. Anecdotal reports suggest that the number and scale of protests in 2004 is even higher.

Apart from the upsurge in numbers, there are indications of long-standing undercurrents blending into an unprecedented configuration that could seriously challenge the regime. First, recent incidents seem to reflect the limits of the piecemeal, carrot and stick, anything-but-political-reform methods adopted by the regime in dealing with social instability. Second, workers, rural protesters and ethnic minorities are increasingly organized, and local officials are no longer able to confine news of unrest to local word-of-mouth circulation. In

particular, the use of new communication technologies (from cell phones to Internet forums) appears to be reaching a critical mass in China, rendering crude censorship obsolete and ineffective.

In November 2004, the Communist Party’s Propaganda Bureau reportedly issued a directive against the further “frank reporting” of violent incidents.² But while news of disturbances remains censored in China’s print and Internet media, information continues to spread through bulletin boards, over the telephone and on overseas Chinese-language Web sites. Reports on overseas Web sites and in the international press eventually make their way back to China.

Following are incidents of unrest reported in the media since the 16th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee session in March 2003—clearly only a tiny percentage of the actual incidents that took place during that time.

DATE	LOCATION	PEOPLE INVOLVED	CAUSE OF PROTEST
Jun 27–29, 2003	Yulin, Shaanxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 10,000 investors • 200 police and military officers 	The group protested local government’s involvement in an oil well privation deal that caused loss to investors. 10 were detained.
Oct 28, 2003	Zhoucheung, Shandong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several thousand protesters • 800 police 	The riot broke out the day after a hawker clashed with rural officials. A government official’s car ran over the hawker when he attempted to block the vehicle. The hawker’s family went to the municipal government to appeal, and eventually a thousand people stormed the municipal government offices.
Nov 5, 2003	Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300–400 workers • 10 police 	Protesters gathered outside the municipal government building to demonstrate against looming layoffs at a state-owned enterprise (SOE). Police patrolled the half-day protest until it ended peacefully.
Nov 18–19, 2003	Xianfan City, Hubei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,000 workers • 500 police 	Workers protested against an SOE privatization plan expected to lead to a layoff of 3,000 workers. The protesters clashed with police who were called in to clear the crowd, leading to five people being arrested and more than 10 injured.
Nov 28, 2003	Jinyun, Zhejiang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000 villagers • 30 police 	A protest by one man over an official seizure of farmland developed into a mass rally of nearly 1,000 villagers. Clashes between police and villagers ended after four people were detained and several injured.
Dec 11, 2003	Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000 villagers from Henan • 50 Paramilitary police 	The protesters staged a sit-in on the Beijing section of the Beijing-Guangzhou railway to protest a resettlement plan by the local Construction Bureau. Paramilitary police were called in to clear the crowd before the arrival of an express train, with four villagers killed and seven injured in the incident.
Dec 13, 2003	Changsha, Hunan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500 workers • 50 police 	Workers protesting feared job losses from planned economic reforms demanded government guarantees over their futures. Police monitored the protest, which blocked roads in downtown Changsha City but ended peacefully after paralyzing traffic for four hours.
Jan to Feb 2004	Tangshan and QinHuang Island, Hebei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 30,000 farmers participated (11,283 from Tangshan; 18,000 from QinHuang Island) 	Farmers protested official abuse of power, corrupt practices and inadequate compensation in the process of forcibly taking their land. After several failed attempts to have their complaints heard by local petitioning offices, farmers signed a petition letter to the Hebei NPC demanding the dismissal of local corrupt officials as NPC representatives. The separate petitions from Tangshan and QinHuang Island were timed for the NPC meeting held in March.

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Mar 28–31, 2004	Yuzhong District, Chongqing	• 1,000 local residents	A three-day sit-in blocked a major road in Chongqing in protest against a planned forced relocation for a development project.
Apr 8, 2004	Ningde District and Fuzhou District, Fujian	• More than 10,000 farmers	Farmers protested official abuse of power, corrupt practices and inadequate compensation in the process of forcibly taking their land. More than 10,000 farmers signed a petition calling for the dismissal of local government officials and NPC representatives, which was sent to the Fujian NPC.
Jul 31, 2004	Zhengzhou, Henan	• Dozens of villagers • 600 riot police	Clashes between villagers and police resulted when police carried out raids against “troublemakers” who had organized protests over land deals approved by village leaders. Police were reported to have opened fire to unarmed villagers, and more than 30 people were reported injured.
Sept 3–10, 2004	Huainan coal mine, Anhui	• 100,000 miners and their families • 700 armed and civilian police	Protesters held a week-long demonstration and strike demanding job security and compensation for injuries, and protesting against corruption, forced overtime and arbitrary lay-offs.
Sept 13, 2004	Xian, Shaanxi	• 1,000 employees from Shaanxi Precision Alloy	Protesters blocked traffic for four days to protest the privatization of an SOE and demand an investigation into missing company assets.
Sept 17, 2004	Xuzhou City, Jiangsu	• 20,000 residents	Demonstrators gathered outside the municipal government offices to protest official corruption, waste and abuse of power.
Sept 15–18, 2004	Baoding and Tangshang, Hebei	• 50,000 unemployed workers	Workers and their families demonstrated against official corruption and job loss in the cities of Baoding and Tangshang.
Sept 14– Oct 22, 2004	Xianyang City, Shaanxi	• 7,000 workers from the state-owned Tianwang Textile Factory • 1,000 police	Workers occupied the factory to protest a takeover by a Hong Kong company, which dismissed the entire workforce and demanded that all future employees sign a new contract at lower wages. Workers were also forced to sell their shares in the firm to the new owners.
October 6, 2004	Dongguan, Guangdong	• 5,000 workers • 500 anti-riot police officers	Employees of a Japanese-owned printing factory staged a strike over substandard food. Dozens of workers were arrested or injured, and a police car was destroyed.
Sept 21– Oct 8, 2004	Golog, Qinghai	• 200 Tibetan students	The group gathered outside the Golog Prefecture government building to protest officials’ failure to provide jobs to graduates.
Oct 6, 2004	Shenzhen	• 3,000 workers from an electronics factory • 100 police	Workers disrupted traffic for four hours with a protest on the city’s main highway over low wages and harsh working conditions. Two young female workers and five supporters were arrested.
Oct 11, 2004	Qiqihar City, Heilongjiang	• 200 workers and about 30,000 sympathizers	About 200 workers from 20 SOEs protested at the municipal government offices, demanding their pensions and back pay from the social security fund after being laid off. Police and corporate security personnel drove the protesters off, but on the next evening more than 30,000 people surrounded the government offices, demanding government response over the embezzlement of social security funds and other public funds.
Oct 12–18, 2004	Baotou City, Inner Mongolia	• 10,000 workers	Workers from five SOEs initially stormed the factories’ party committee building, then took control of the public square and first three floors of the municipal government offices.
Oct 14–18, 2004	Pingging City, Henan	• 5,000 private tradesmen	5,000 tradesmen mobilized a market strike and staged a five-day sit-in outside the municipal government offices to protest abuses by tax collectors. The strikes later spread to schools and work places. Police were called in to force the tradesmen to resume market operation. More than 30 police officers and protesters were reported injured in the clashes, and 30 protesters were arrested.
Oct 18, 2004	Wanzhou, Chongqing	• 80,000 workers and unemployed • Thousands of police and paramilitary units were called in from neighboring cities to restore order	A worker accidentally bumped into the wife of a local taxation bureau director, who beat the worker in spite of his apology. Onlookers called in police, but the official was allowed to walk free. News of the incident spread throughout the city’s working class district, and tens of thousands of local residents surrounded the government offices demanding justice for the injured man.
Oct 18, 2004	Jining City, Shandong	• Hundreds of employees from the state-owned Jining Department Store plus thousands of sympathizers	Workers protested low wages and extended hours imposed after the company was restructured.
Oct 20, 2004	Funing County, Jiangsu	• 3,000 workers from Funing County Textile Factory	Workers protesting layoffs were seized at a public meeting organized by the government in Yancheng City. They were charged with “disturbing social order.”
Oct 22, 2004	Bengbu City, Anhui	• 5,000 mostly female retirees plus thousands of sympathizers	The protesters, former employees of a major state-owned textile factory, blocked major city thoroughfares to demand an increase to

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Oct 22, 2004, <i>cont.</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riot police 	their poverty-level pensions. Riot police were initially deployed, but were withdrawn out of concern that a crackdown might trigger a Wanzhou-scale riot.
Oct 27– Nov 6, 2004	Hanyuan County, Sichuan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,000 villagers 	In protest against unreasonable compensation for land seized in a dam project, villagers barricaded the dam construction area and surrounded the provincial Party secretary. Police officers and riot police were called in, with at least one person reported killed in the clash.
Oct 28, 2004	Langchengang, Henan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 Han and 500 Hui residents 	Fierce ethnic conflicts broke out after a Hui man was mugged by Han locals. Riot police were called in to seal off access between the two communities. More than a hundred people were reported dead, including 15 police officers, and more than 400 were injured.
Oct 29, 2004	Huhhot, Inner Mongolia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,000 students of Inner Mongolian Normal University • Hundreds of armed police and security personnel 	Police imposed a campus curfew after a concert by a popular Inner Mongolian group was suddenly cancelled.
Nov 7, 2004	Fanyu, Guangdong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 1,000 workers 	Workers protested at their factory's front gate, demanding a day of leave from work every week.
Nov 8, 2004	Baiyuan District, Guangzhou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 people • 60 riot police 	Uighur workers and Han security officers clashed over a minor dispute.
Nov 10, 2004	Xianshan County, Yunnan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 residents 	Protesters surrounded the village police station to demand compensation from a policeman who had knocked down a villager.
Nov 10, 2004	Jieyang, Guangdong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 20,000 residents • 1,000 police 	Hundreds of villagers surrounded the office of a toll-bridge after a woman was reported to have been beaten by toll-booth staff when she protested the toll. The protest developed into a riot, during which protesters reportedly broke into the office and burned vehicles. More than 20,000 onlookers blocked the roadways. Five people were arrested at the scene and 12 more were detained later.
Nov 12, 2004	Jiling, Guangxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hundreds of villagers • 40–50 riot police 	Villagers of Qixing District organized a sit-in at the city government building to protest eviction from their land.
Nov 24, 2004	Baoan District, Shenzhen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thousands of workers • More than 100 police 	Workers protested against lay-offs and lack of compensation after the relocation of an electronics factory. Protesters clashed with security guards before police were called in to restore order. One worker was arrested.
Dec 4, 2004	Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,000–4,000 petitioners • 400–500 police 	Protesters gathered around the CCTV building in Beijing on Human Rights Day to fight for the right to petition and to protest against government corruption. About 1,000 protesters were taken to a detention center.
Dec 6, 2004	Yuncheng City, Shaanxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 construction workers • Traffic police 	Worker rose up in anger over traffic police handling of a hit-and-run accident. Two policemen were killed, and police arrested nine workers at the construction project's office.
Dec 8, 2004	Qinzhou, Guangxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,000 people 	A crowd converged on a local police station after local officials allegedly assaulted four disabled buskers. Protesters reportedly damaged the building with sticks and rocks.
Nov–Dec 21, 2004	Haibei Village, Guangzhou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hundreds of villagers 	Villagers barricaded roads and pressed for an investigation into alleged wrongdoings by their former Party secretary, who landed them with debts of 40 million <i>yuan</i> in a deal involving a Hong Kong-invested company.
Dec 21, 2004	Luzhou, Sichuan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,000 workers • 1,000 police 	3,000 employees of a PLA-linked chemical plant went on strike after learning that 1,500 workers would be laid off in the plant's restructuring plan. Several protesters were detained in minor scuffles after a thousand police were called in.
Dec 22, 2004	Dongguan, Guangdong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50,000 migrant workers 	A local vigilante group allegedly beat up a 19-year-old migrant worker after a minor dispute with a motorcycle driver. Friends and relatives of the victim gathered at the office of the vigilante group to demand compensation and punishment for the assault. Others joined in, and police were called in to control the crowd. Police used tear gas and detained ten protesters.

The information in this chart was compiled by Wing Lam, with additional comments supplied by Nicolas Becquelin.

1. BBC, June 8, 2004, "Chinese protests on the rise," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3786541.stm>.
2. "Zhongxuanbao xialing jinzhi meiti daodao chongtu shijian," reported on the Web site of Epoch Times on November 13, 2004: <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/4/11/14/n717282.htm>.