

Chinese report on labor camp fuels reform debate

April 9 2013, by Didi Tang

(AP)—A Chinese magazine's report on abuses at a notorious labor camp is giving reformers added ammunition in a campaign to abolish a part of the penal system that China's government says needs change.

The report this week in *Lens* magazine documents the long hours worked by female inmates at the Masanjia labor camp and the punishments for breaking rules or not meeting production quotas for cutting fabric, making button holes, sewing and ironing clothes for apparel makers. Based on interviews with ex-inmates, prosecutors and former and current camp officials, the 14-page report describes prisoners being locked in tiny punishment cells, shocked with electric batons, handcuffed to two bunk beds with arms stretched wide and bound to a bench with their backs hunched over and hands and feet cuffed.

While abuses in the labor camps are generally known among the public, the report—rare in that it appeared in a formally published domestic magazine—shocked Chinese in its details. Printed in a little-known magazine, it was posted online, where it quickly spread and became the most read story Monday on the four biggest news sites before it was censored and then re-posted on a few sites.

[Legal experts](#) and public intellectuals seized on it to renew their calls to end the punishment centers, known formally as labor re-education. "Wait no time to repeal labor re-education," sociologist Yu Jianrong posted on his [Twitter](#)-like microblog, which has over 1.6 million followers.

The Justice Department in Liaoning, the province where Masanjia is located, referred queries to the provincial Propaganda Department, which declined comment. A retired Justice Ministry researcher called the report far-fetched.

Even so, it lands in the middle of a debate about how and when to reform a much-disliked practice. Labor re-education is a small part of the wider penal system and allows police to imprison people for as long as four years without a [court trial](#) or judge's review. Critics say the lack of judicial review violates the constitution and in recent years has increasingly been used by police to silence ordinary Chinese petitioning to redress grievances against local officials.

The new Communist Party leadership installed in November has said it will reform the system and has promised to introduce plans to do so by the end of the year. Some legal experts say the Lens report should add to the momentum for change.

"I have heard about irregularities in the system, but this report exceeded the baseline of what I knew," said law professor Hou Xinyi of Nankai University in the city of Tianjin. "I doubt if the top leadership knows the situation on the ground. If the claims are true, this [report](#) will help the government firm up their determination to resolve the problem."

Copyright 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Chinese report on labor camp fuels reform debate (2013, April 9) retrieved 29 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-04-chinese-labor-fuels-reform-debate.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.