



Colorful lights are everywhere at Christmas, adding much to the atmosphere of celebration. While Chinese-made, low cost lights are taking a big market share throughout the world, few realize they are stained with the sweat and blood of prisoners in China's labor camps.

Cheap labor from China's numerous labor camps is a major incentive that underlies cooperation between manufacturers and government agencies to transfer labor-intensive products, such as Christmas lights, to production-lines in labor-camp workshops. This has turned labor camps into lucrative businesses when laborers are coerced to work at the production lines under harsh discipline, creating the myth of "cheap Chinese products" and a "booming Chinese economy".

Threat of torture is behind high productivity

On 23rd October 2008, Zhou Hongyu was kidnapped to the Detention Centre of Dengzhou city in the Nanyang Region of Henan province, as a surrogate by police who could not find and arrest his mother-in-law Wang Xiaobi, a Falun Gong practitioner.

In the Detention Centre, Zhou was subjected to slavery, such as manufacturing Christmas lights, for more than 20 hours each day. When the work quotas were too big to fill, warders instructed other laborers to physically abuse him in order to force him to continue, leaving little time for sleeping.

Zhou, unable to do his quotas, became a target of torture in various forms, such as verbal abuse, slaps in the face, being beaten with plastic shoes and flushed with cold water. After a few days, a young Zhou was reduced to a state of mind-wandering although he was only in his 20s.

Christmas Lights Stained With Blood

Tangyu

Huang Kui, a former detainee in No 2 Labor Camp of Zhuhai City, Guangdong province, said detainees showed an extraordinary eagerness to work, which had no match in any enterprises of a free society. But it was really the result of intimidation. Exorbitant quotas were assigned and must be achieved by every means. To accomplish these, camp authorities resorted to measures of coercion, including abuse, beating as well as torture and extreme sleep deprivation.

A detainee of a 're-education-thru-labor' program in Dashan Labour Camp, Qingdao City revealed that "a hired roughneck, with a high-heeled leather shoe in hand, was watching us all the time. Any body caught working slowly would receive an instant hard crack at the back of his head."

The harsh treatment resulted in prisoners suffering dizziness, loss of vision, festering wounds on the hands, blood splitting and infectious diseases.

LI Yin, who was once jailed in Shanghai Womens Re-education- thru-Labor Center, pointed out that "manufacturing colored lights involves different production processes. One of them is to weld two contacts of a lamp to wires using a special solution and soldering tin. Because this process must be without air current, the 100 prison workers, packed in a 60 sqm workshop without ventilation, inhaled toxic fumes as the work progressed. Having been exposed to this grave health hazard, they often complained of dizziness and nausea.

Testing is another deleterious process, particularly to the vision. At the end of the day, one could "visibly" feel his sight worse - shedding tears, flashing vision and things being blurred. "

With the everyday strenuous labour of the prisoners, decorative lights come out of the production lines and tiny lights were threaded onto a wire. For detainees in Henan Provincial No 1 Labor Camp, coercive work consigned them to the misery of two hour sleep a day. They are "as thin as a reed with little appetite and often spit blood due to physical exhaustion." said 46 year old Zhou Xiaoling, a Falun Gong practitioner, who had a similar experience in Qigong Jail, Hunan Province.

She revealed:" At that time, I connected four to five thousand colour lights to pieces of wire a day. My eyes were hurt so badly that I cannot see things clearly. Our meals were mouldy rice mixed with a lot of sand and chaff. A small piece of pickle was served for a meal. We never tasted salt in dishes. It was worse than dog's food."

Duan Maoquan, who was imprisoned for five months in Tianhe Jail, Guangzhou city, pointed out that malnutrition was designed to prevent prisoners from escaping.

"The inhuman treatment of detainees and lack of hygienic facilities in the prison has exposed many to various diseases. Abrasions in the hands led to infectious diseases and skin diseases."

“Not everyone can survive. I saw in my own eyes how a new prisoner died shortly after his imprisonment. He was tortured to death actually by the poisonous environment, not by the physical violence of other prisoners” described Huang Kuai.

Festering blood, viruses and resentment: ingredients of the products

“Because of excessive workloads, many had developed blisters in hands, which then deteriorated to become bloody, and when they were broken, festering blood oozed into the products as prisoners were handling them with excruciating pain. It is not hard to conceive how filthy dirty the products could have been, with widespread infectious and venereal diseases inside the labor camps.

According to reports, short-circuit incidents are common in the Womens Reform Centre in Shanxi Province due to the lack of safety measures on assembly lines. Inferior products are labelled as quality ones: not just the colour light but many other labor-intensive products as well.

Farm work includes harvesting beans and rooting out weeds in the fields. Industrial products range from toys, leather shoes, wallets and purses, dollies, embroidery products, artificial hair braids, decorative plastic flowers, ignitions of cigarette lighters, toy bugles, decorative pearl strings, lamps, garments, metal brushes, various packing containers for medicine, wines, moon cakes and gifts, chips for electronic products, packs of medicine and tooth pick, chop sticks and even food.

Artist Ms Zhang Cuiying, who resides in Australia now, observed “many prisoners were forced to pack toothpicks, chopsticks and other products while suffering various infectious diseases and dermatitis in many of the labor camps.” She found it “disgusting to recall.”

Deepest misery in the shadow of the festival lights

A former prisoner in the Tianhe Jail, Guangzhou for multi-level distribution of foreign products said: “According to the law of the Communist Party, a detainee is not a criminal before the court makes a decision, let alone innocent Falun Gong practitioners. What is the re-education for - nothing but an excuse to squeeze the prisoners for the highest return.”