



Chinese workers are denied many basic rights. Above, migrant workers protest low pay and miners, right, endure unsafe working conditions.

AP/Wide World Photos

Workers' Rights and Safety Compromised in China

In February of 2005, China saw their deadliest reported mine accident in six decades, as 214 workers were killed in an explosion in the northern city of Fuxin. Eight months later, a coal-dust explosion at the Dongfeng Coal Mine in China killed 171 miners.

Overall, 5,986 people died in accidents in China's coal mines last year, according to China's National Development and Reform Commission – a shocking statistic and damning evidence that the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is still not doing enough to protect China's workers.

Of course, the coal mining industry isn't the only area the ACFTU is coming up short. The Chinese government reported 126,760

deaths in workplace accidents last year, including industrial sector incidents, trade and commercial enterprise accidents, fires, and waterways and railway traffic incidents.

Not Independent

The ACFTU is not an independent trade union. Rather, they are part of the Chinese government and party structure. The ACFTU and the Chinese government's repeated pledges to protect their workers continually come up short, due mostly to unrealistic production targets that compromise workers' safety.

Add to that the suspect enforcement of health and safety standards and the fact most ACFTU chairs are appointed by company and factory leaders, not the employees – it isn't surpris-

ing the workers' interest isn't their primary concern.

Yet, SEIU President Andy Stern has invited an ACFTU delegation to his group's organizing summit in Las Vegas in March.

For years, the AFL-CIO has refused to recognize the ACFTU as a legitimate trade union, citing their subservience to China's communist party and their inability to protect their workers' rights.

When asked by *Time* magazine if he's been to China, Stern said, "Yes, several times. We are spending time with Chinese unions so they don't adopt a U.S. model with the attitude of 'I've got mine, and the devil take the hindmost.'"

As an expert in the area, Stern's concerns should be taken quite literally.