



# Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China

By *Eli Friedman*

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## **Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China** By Eli Friedman

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, worker resistance in China increased rapidly despite the fact that certain segments of the state began moving in a pro-labor direction. In explaining this, Eli Friedman argues that the Chinese state has become hemmed in by an “insurgency trap” of its own devising and is thus unable to tame expansive worker unrest. Labor conflict in the process of capitalist industrialization is certainly not unique to China and indeed has appeared in a wide array of countries around the world. What is distinct in China, however, is the combination of postsocialist politics with rapid capitalist development.

Other countries undergoing capitalist industrialization have incorporated relatively independent unions to tame labor conflict and channel insurgent workers into legal and rationalized modes of contention. In contrast, the Chinese state only allows for one union federation, the All China Federation of Trade Unions, over which it maintains tight control. Official unions have been unable to win recognition from workers, and wildcat strikes and other forms of disruption continue to be the most effective means for addressing workplace grievances. In support of this argument, Friedman offers evidence from Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces, where unions are experimenting with new initiatives, leadership models, and organizational forms.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"[B]y identifying the insurgency trap and emphasizing the critical role of organizational and economic factors in shaping union activities, Friedman makes a valuable contribution to the literature. As the dynamics of worker-state interactions and the politics of labor representation are key for the future of the Chinese labor movement, Friedman's book is a must-read for anyone with interest in China's labor."?Mingwei Liu, *ILRReview* (October 2014)

"[*Insurgency Trap*] represents a central and innovative contribution to labor studies, linking as it does history, ethnography, biography, and theory into a revised Polanyian framework that scholars from a wide range of fields will certainly find useful. It is thoroughly researched and deftly theorized, advancing our understanding of labor, institutions, social movements, politics, and power in China. This book is vital reading for anyone interested in labor, globalization, transitional societies, and inequality more broadly."?Eileen M. Otis, *American Journal of Sociology* (July 2015)

"*Insurgency Trap* provides us an in-depth analysis of labor unrest among migrant workers in China. These workers now form the most numerous part of the Chinese working class, they dominate China's giant export-oriented manufacturing sector, and they have been increasingly willing to protest and strike to improve their miserable conditions. By putting the state-run unions at the center of his analysis, Eli Friedman helps illuminate some of the fundamental dynamics shaping labor relations in China."?Joel Andreas, The Johns Hopkins University, author of *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*

"*Insurgency Trap* is a well-written, provocative, and incisive book about the dilemmas of worker protest and union politics in China. It identifies a central problematic?how workers convert labor unrest into concrete material and political gain?and discusses why migrant workers in China face myriad barriers to securing more stable forms of institutional change. What makes Eli Friedman's book compelling and unique is his probing and systematic examination of how states and unions respond to rapidly increasing labor unrest."?Jennifer Jihye Chun, University of Toronto, author of *Organizing at the Margins: The Symbolic Politics of Labor in South Korea and the United States*

"*Insurgency Trap* is an original and important book that explains why labor militancy, wildcat strikes, and civil unrest have increased in recent years in the People's Republic of China, notwithstanding concerted

efforts by the central government to decommodify labor and strengthen worker rights. This is a first-rate piece of research that will shape our understanding of labor politics not just in the PRC but throughout the developing world."?Richard M. Locke, Howard R. Swearer Director, Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, and Professor, Department of Political Science, Brown University

"Eli Friedman has had excellent access to the Chinese trade union, and this eminently readable book is full of new inside information, interesting anecdotes, and new conceptualizations. This is a must-read for anyone curious about the relationships among Chinese labor, the official trade union, and the Chinese state."?Anita Chan, University of Technology, Sydney

About the Author

Eli Friedman is Assistant Professor of International and Comparative Labor at Cornell University.

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**Mark Copeland:**

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the e-book entitled Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China. Try to the actual book Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China as your pal. It means that it can to get your friend when you truly feel alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortunated for you. The book makes you more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , we should make new experience and knowledge with this book.

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