EDITORIAL

Dear readers, here's the third issue of China News - Stories from China at work, the newsletter on work in China, which is a collaboration between Iscos, and its regional branches of Emilia Romagna, Piemonte, Sicilia and Toscana and the site Cineresi.info. This month the main issue is the "famine" of workers and an interview with Anita Chan, one of the world's leading experts on work in China. Happy reading!

IN BRIEF

Forced overtime masked
According to a recent survey, the Chinese employees work an average of 8.66 hours per day, while 30% work more than eleven hours. The survey showed that very often overtime are not paid in accordance with the law and that many workers pressurised from the company or hoping to get promotions end up working overtime "voluntarily", without receiving compensation. The survey results have been stigmatized in an article of the official Xinhua news agency in which is pointed out the illegality of such a trend.

Increase in wages, apparently
According to data from the new Green Paper on rural areas published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in the first four months of 2012 the average wage of Chinese migrant workers amounted to 2,173 yuan (about 268 €), 124 yuan more than in 2011. As regards the legal minimum wage, 14 local governments have raised the amount; the city with higher minimum wages, 1,500 yuan (about 185 €), is Shenzhen. On closer inspection, however, the wage increase is only apparent: the percentage of increase over the previous year decreased by 4.6% while the cost of living has risen in all Chinese cities. In light of these data it is clear that the situation is not so good for Chinese migrant workers, always in trouble to get to the end of the month.

FOCUS

A conversation with Anita Chan
Anita Chan, a visiting fellow at Australian National University, is an undisputed authority on labor issues in China. After beginning his academic career taking care of the Red Guard generation, Chinese rural society and mass movements in China, she is dealing with Chinese workers by nearly two decades. We met in March and discussed with her some of the latest developments in the labor situation in China.

The last few years in China have been dominated by heated debates on policy in the field of labor. In particular, much has been discussed on the Labour Contract Law that came into force in early 2008. In your opinion, the laws approved in recent years have had some significant impact on working conditions in China? The Labour Contract Law is very controversial. There have been several cases, the law is rather favorable to workers, but, as happens with any other law, the employers can bypass or avoid it. To bypass it, in recent years, companies have begun to recruit workers through agencies rather than hire them directly. In this way, the agencies become responsible for these workers and companies can maintain their flexibility. [...]