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Slaves' rescued from China firm

Thirty-one dirty and disorientated workers have been rescued from a brickwork factory in China, where they were being held as virtual slaves.

Eight workers were so traumatised by their experiences that they were only able to remember their names.

The labourers had to work unpaid for 20 hours at a time, and were only given bread and water in return.

The brickworks, in a poor inland province, is owned by the son of the local Communist Party secretary.

Local police told the BBC that the owner had been arrested, and that his father was under investigation.

Several other people have also been arrested, although the foreman is still on the run.

Harsh regime

According to a report the rescued workers had been duped into working at the factory.

Once there, they faced a harsh regime. One man was even reported to have been beaten to death with a hammer, because he did not work fast enough.

Police are now arranging for the workers to get the wages they should have been paid, and then they will send them home, although the eight disorientated workers cannot remember where that is.

Local people said the brickworks would have been closed down a long time ago had it not been for the protection of the party secretary.

China has tens of millions of migrant workers.

They leave their rural homes in search of work, but often have to endure harsh conditions, bad treatment and low pay.

There is little they can do about their lot, particularly when, as in this case, factory owners are protected by powerful local officials.