

Compromising Citizenry: The Perceived Irrelevance of Rightful Resistance among Peasant Coal Miners Suffering from Pneumoconiosis

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Abstract

Peasants' use of existing legal and political resources to right wrongs done to them and the law as a narrative frame to assert their claims in protests have been well captured in the concept of "rightful resistance." The image of a "restive citizenry" by which peasants—as rightful resisters—struggle valiantly to defend their own rights, however, has been increasingly questioned by scholars who find either that the wronged peasants do not get angrier or that their rightful resistance is eventually muted. The present article examines dozens of inland-provincial peasant-coal miners who suffer from mining-induced pneumoconiosis. It is also found that the victims express an unwillingness to pursue their rights through the courts or enact rightful resistance if the courts or other formal institutions fall short in delivering the promised rights. In examining how peasant-coal miners consider what is the "best way" to obtain compensation, this article suggests that they could be said to be a "compromising citizenry" through which they recognize the law and formal procedures as legitimate but at the same time consider bribing state officials as a prerequisite to protect their legal rights.

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