

# Chinese police generate “sex scandal” against Hong Kong election candidate

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30 August 2004

In what has all the hallmarks of a political set-up, Chinese police have arrested Alex Ho, a Democratic Party candidate in the upcoming Legislative Council elections in Hong Kong, on charges of soliciting a prostitute. The 46-year-old Ho was detained in a police raid in the early hours of August 13 in the southern city of Dongguang. He was allegedly found in a hotel room with Zhou, a 25-year-old woman.

Ho and Zhou are now facing six months of “reform through labour” detention under a sweeping administrative provision that allows Chinese police to hold minor offenders without trial. The mainland and Hong Kong media immediately reported the “sex scandal” and the lurid details provided by a Chinese police spokesman who claimed Ho, “had sex with a woman in a hotel room and a money transaction was involved”.

After speaking to Ho, Democratic Party official Fred Li told the media that Ho had only signed a confession because police threatened to charge him with rape if he refused. “From the way that the mainland security police handled the case, there are a lot of suspicious points.... We are shocked and disturbed by this, especially the speed with which he was jailed without trial,” Li said.

The Hong Kong-based *Mingpao Daily* on August 17 published statements that it claimed were written by Ho and Zhou. Ho admitted to having a relationship with Zhou but insisted that he had met her in June. Both denied that there had been any financial negotiations before having sex. Ho is a sales manager for a Japanese garment company that sources its goods from the Humen district of Dongguang city.

None of the allegations against Ho have been proven. Moreover, it is very unusual for a first-time offender to be jailed for soliciting a prostitute, let alone for such a

lengthy period. While prostitution is illegal in China, it is rampant, especially in relatively prosperous regions like Guangdong Province where young women from poorer areas come to find a living. Local governments and police generally turn a blind eye, that is, if they are not actually running the rackets directly.

The purpose of the police raid that netted Ho was not to shut down prostitution in Dongguang city. A reporter for the *Asia Times* rang four of the “prostitution black holes” in Humen district that the police had supposedly closed during the raid. According to the article on August 18, these restaurants and karaoke bars were operating as normal.

Under Hong Kong’s Basic Law, Ho cannot stand as a candidate if he is jailed for more than three months. The Hong Kong Justice Department issued a statement last week declaring that Ho would not be disqualified from standing because his detention was administrative and not the result of a criminal prosecution. At the very least, however, Ho’s jailing is aimed at undermining his reputation and that of the Democratic Party as well as preventing him from participating in the election campaign.

Ho’s detention is a sharp warning of the methods that Beijing will use in the lead up to Legislative Council elections on September 12. While only half of the seats are to be elected, the Chinese leadership is concerned that the Democratic Party will win most of them and thus put pressure on the administration headed by its appointee, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa.

Beijing fears above all the growing opposition of ordinary working people in Hong Kong to its anti-democratic methods and to declining living standards. On July 1, 2003, half a million people protested against Tung’s attempts to impose draconian new anti-subversion laws that would have enabled police to

crack down on organisations illegalised under China's police state laws. Tung was compelled to back off but he is deeply unpopular. In local district council elections last November, the Democratic Party won 92 seats, compared to 62 for the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB).

On July 1 this year, hundreds of thousands of people took part in huge protests against Beijing's decision in April to rule out full direct elections for Tung's post of chief executive in 2007 and the Legislative Council in 2008. Despite the efforts of the Democratic Party to appease Beijing and defuse tensions, the Stalinist bureaucracy has made no concessions, fearing that the granting of democratic rights in Hong Kong will lead to similar demands and protests in mainland China itself.

Before and after this year's protest, Beijing resorted to a variety of methods aimed at intimidating the Hong Kong population. A number of residents have reported receiving strange telephone calls from their relatives on the mainland urging them to vote for pro-Beijing parties in the Legislative Council election. Three outspoken radio hosts resigned, claiming that they had received death threats from "patriotic forces". On August 1, in an unmistakable show of force, the Chinese military held its first ever parade of troops and armoured vehicles through Hong Kong.

The Chinese leadership's view of Hong Kong's "democracy" was summed up in an interview with Chen Zuoer, a senior official in charge of Hong Kong affairs, with the Xinhua news agency on August 21. "If we aren't confident that direct elections will produce leaders who are patriotic and love Hong Kong, then Hong Kong doesn't meet the criteria for having direct elections. If there are people who want to turn Hong Kong into a base for opposing the mainland government under the pretence of democracy, what do you do?" he exclaimed. Then came the answer: "You have to interfere."



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