

Hong Kong extradition bill debate delayed as additional protests called

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Following mass protests Wednesday in Hong Kong, opposing a controversial extradition bill, nothing is resolved. Yesterday, sporadic demonstrations took place but far smaller than the massive protests around the city's Legislative Council (LegCo) complex the previous day. Additional protests have been called for Sunday and Monday.

Hong Kong's government offices remained closed Thursday and Friday and the debate on the extradition bill, originally planned for Wednesday, was postponed. It is unclear when debate will resume, but a vote has been scheduled for June 20. The bill would allow extradition to any country, including mainland China. Opponents say it will be used to arrest and silence political opponents of the Stalinist regime in Beijing.

Tens of thousands participated in Wednesday's demonstrations, largely students and youth. Police responded with tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets. A total of 94 people were injured and 11 arrested. Chief Executive Carrie Lam slandered the protest as an "organized riot."

Beijing's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, echoed Lam, saying: "What happened in the Admiralty area was not a peaceful rally, but a riot organized by a group. We support the Hong Kong government's dealing with the situation in accordance with the law."

However, the Hong Kong Bar Association pointed to the police as the instigators of the violence. It said the police "may well have overstepped its lawful powers," using wholly unnecessary force against largely unarmed protesters who did not appear to pose any immediate threat to the police or the public."

Reflecting concerns that the protests will spill over to the mainland, where social discontent is also growing, Beijing attempted to shift blame to "outside forces." The state-owned *China Daily* on Monday claimed

"some Hong Kong residents have been hoodwinked by the opposition camp and their foreign allies into supporting the anti-extradition campaign." Hu Xinjin, editor of *Global Times*, another state paper, wrote on Twitter Thursday: "I don't think Westerners that encourage protesters in Hong Kong want the best for the city."

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday offered a muted response, saying "I don't know what" kind of message Hong Kongers were sending Beijing. He added: "I hope it all works out for China and for Hong Kong." Undoubtedly, anxiety exists in Washington that similar huge protests can and will erupt as the US government continues its own attack on democratic rights at home.

Hong Kong is part of China, but is governed on the basis of "one China, two systems" following Britain's return of the city to China in 1997. The chief executive is elected from a committee of candidates chosen by Beijing. Pro-Beijing parties similarly control the Legislative Council. Hong Kong residents have demanded the right to directly elect the chief executive, without input from Beijing. This led to the protracted mass protests in 2014, known as the Umbrella or Occupy Movement.

The "pan-democracy" camp, a collection of parties opposed to direct rule from Beijing, has postured as a defender of democratic rights in Hong Kong. Older parties, like the Democratic Party, seek compromise and limited reforms with Beijing. They accept the latter's rule while seeking to protect Hong Kong's role as a global financial center.

Newer parties, such as People Power, posture as more radical alternatives. However, their response to the latest protests has been to make appeals to US imperialism. Ray Chan, People Power's chairman and

a member of the LegCo, promoted on Twitter the intervention of US politicians like Representative Jim McGovern, head of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

McGovern tweeted on Wednesday that he, Senator Marco Rubio, and Representative Chris Smith would introduce “the ‘HK Human Rights [and] Democracy Act’ to reaffirm US commitment to human rights [and] the rule of law at a time when Hong Kong’s autonomy is imperiled by Chinese [government] interference [and] a revised extradition law.”

McGovern expressed concern for “human rights advocates, business persons, journalists and American citizens” who would be put “at risk of rendition to the mainland.” This is sheer hypocrisy. The British government has just certified a US extradition request for journalist Julian Assange—essentially a rendition operation to silence and intimidate journalists who would expose US crimes.

Like People Power, the student organization Demosist? has taken on a radical tone, while promoting the intervention of US politicians. Demosist? is led by Joshua Wong, who gained recognition for his role in the Umbrella Movement. On its website, the organization states that it “aims to achieve democratic self-determination in Hong Kong. Through direct action, popular referenda, and non-violent means, we push for the city’s political and economic autonomy from the oppression of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and capitalist hegemony.”

Demosist? has highlighted the roles of McGovern, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi in criticizing the Hong Kong extradition bill in May. Demosist? wrote on May 19: “Democratic and Republican Senators will send an open letter to Carrie Lam and personally send staff to Hong Kong to lobby.”

The US will use its resources to pressure the Hong Kong government for concessions to its imperialist interests, not for the working class. Washington’s primary concern is to maintain current business relations in Hong Kong, while exploiting the current protests to claim Beijing is violating the “rule of law,” an accusation used to justify economic pressure on China and the US-led military buildup in Asia.

Furthermore, Demosist?’s call for “direct action” is meant to politically disarm workers and youth at a time

when political leadership is needed more than ever. Without an independent, working class party in opposition to both the Beijing regime and imperialism, as well as the ruling elites in Hong Kong, the protests will be steered into a dead-end, no matter how large and militant. This means building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to fight to unite all Chinese workers as part of the struggle for international socialism.



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