

Hong Kong protesters appeal to mainland Chinese for support

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Another massive protest took place in Hong Kong on Sunday, the latest since anger sparked by a controversial extradition bill that brought one million people into the streets a month ago. This time, protesters marched in Kowloon, which is connected to the mainland. Organizers estimated 230,000 people took part in the march that had the express goal of reaching out to mainland Chinese visiting the city. Police estimated the turnout at 56,000.

Hong Kong protesters have been motivated by fear over the erosion of democratic rights and general disillusionment in the future in a city where 20 percent of the population lives in poverty. Sunday's march began in Tsim Sha Tsui, an area popular with mainland Chinese tourists, and ended at the West Kowloon Railway Station where the high-speed train arrives from Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

Protesters were motivated by the desire to overcome the strict censorship on the mainland of the events in Hong Kong. Eddison Ng, an 18-year-old demonstrator, told the AFP, "We want to show tourists, including mainland China tourists, what is happening in Hong Kong and we hope they can take this concept back to China."

Protesters used Bluetooth to send leaflets written in Mandarin to people's cellphones and banners and signs held by protesters were written with simplified Chinese characters. Both are used on the mainland while Cantonese and traditional Chinese characters predominate in Hong Kong.

While the march itself was peaceful, police and protesters clashed in the nearby Mong Kok district, a densely-packed, working-class area of Hong Kong. When a few hundred protesters refused to disperse, riot police attacked with baton charges and made numerous arrests.

Sunday's march was the first since the protests began to take place on the main island of Hong Kong where the government complex is located. Demonstrators continued to make the same demands, which include the full withdrawal of the Beijing-backed extradition bill which people fear will be used to arrest and send political dissidents to the mainland. Currently, the bill has only been postponed indefinitely.

The other demands are for an independent investigation into police violence, amnesty for all those arrested in the recent protests, and the resignation of Chief Executive Carrie Lam. Beijing has continued to back Lam publicly and there is no indication she intends to step down. Lam's government has responded to the demands with contempt.

One of Lam's advisors and a member of the Executive Council, Fanny Law, stated on Saturday, "Politics is the art of compromising... and the government has already suspended the bill with no plan of reintroducing it. That's effectively the same as withdrawing it. What else do you [protesters] want?" Law also denounced students for refusing to accept a closed-door meeting with Lam, calling their decision a "public relations stunt."

Beijing has also issued veiled threats that it may use its military garrison stationed at Hong Kong to put down protests if they continue or grow beyond the control of Hong Kong authorities. The *PLA Daily*, the official army newspaper, published a rare report on July 2 of military drills by the Hong Kong garrison from the prior week. The report was released a day after protesters broke into and occupied the Legislative Council (LegCo) building.

Beijing is deeply fearful that the protests could spread to the mainland where social discontent also runs high. The state-owned media has blocked most reports of the

protests, but it did give coverage to the LegCo occupation, denouncing the protesters as “ultra-radicals” and “extremely violent,” compared to “people from all walks of life in Hong Kong” who celebrated the July 1 anniversary of the return of the city to China from Great Britain. The denunciation was part of an attempt to discredit the protests as a whole in the eyes of mainlanders and Hong Kong residents and delegitimize the widespread anger that has led to the demonstrations in the first place.

Sections of Hong Kong big business that initially supported the protests against the extradition bill have withdrawn their support citing the violence. In reality though, they are merely covering their tracks with self-righteous tripe. Their real concerns were summed up in the *Financial Times* in a July 7 article. Roy Lim, a business executive with Tung Hing Automation, the largest distributor of Mitsubishi automation equipment in China, claimed to have initially marched with protesters in early June. He denounced a sit-in at Hong Kong’s tax office on June 24.

“I totally don’t agree with what the people did, it’s not necessary, especially when the government has already backed down [on the extradition bill],” Lim complained. “It has really gotten out of hand. We want things to calm down because if people keep surrounding government buildings, it will affect [the business community].”

In other words, while sections of the bourgeoisie supported the suspension of the extradition bill, fearing it would negatively affect business operations if passed, are now concerned that the protests may do the same. They also fear that the ongoing protests will start to raise broader social issues in one of the most unequal cities in the world and lead to demands that directly challenge capitalist rule.

Those genuinely concerned with democratic rights and social equality in Hong Kong and China as a whole must take note: no section of the bourgeoisie is their ally, whether it is big business in Hong Kong or their political representatives in the pan-democrats. The same is true for United States and British imperialism, to which the pan-democrats and protest leaders have also appealed. All of them will seek to use the protest movement to their ends while diverting it into safe channels.

This is what makes the move to reach out to Chinese

mainlanders so important. The only way to fight for democratic and basic social rights is through the unity of the entire Chinese working class on the basis of socialist internationalism in a political struggle against the governments in Hong Kong and Beijing that defend the capitalist system.



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