

Hong Kong protests continue amid clashes with police

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Protests in Hong Kong continued last Saturday and Sunday with marches near the border with mainland China. On both evenings, demonstrators clashed with police as opposition towards the government continues to grow.

The largest protest once again took place on Sunday in Shatin with organizers estimating 115,000 people took part in a march that was largely peaceful. Police claimed only 28,000 participated. Like last week, demonstrators held the march in an area popular with Chinese mainland tourists, hoping to win support in China in order to put pressure on Beijing.

Demonstrators continued to demand that an extradition bill which they fear will be used to arrest and send political dissidents to mainland China be completely revoked. Chief Executive Carrie Lam last Tuesday stated that legislation was “dead,” but it remains indefinitely suspended in the legislature and not withdrawn. Other demands included the dropping of charges against arrested protesters, an independent inquiry into police violence, and Lam’s resignation.

The protesters are also calling for broader democratic rights. Many on Sunday chanted, “We want real universal suffrage!” Only half of Hong Kong’s Legislative Council is directly elected while the chief executive is chosen by a Beijing-vetted committee from Beijing-vetted politicians. One of the demonstrators, Jacky Chan, 26 years old, told the media, “The extradition law has reminded us that what we really need above anything else is democracy.”

By the end of Sunday’s march, however, riot police provoked clashes with demonstrators as they moved to clear the streets. Protesters denounced the police actions and criticized officers for not wearing identification numbers on their uniforms. Fearing the police were preparing to utilize violence, protesters

erected makeshift barricades. However, full-blown clashes only took place a few hours after this standoff started.

Protesters and local politicians accused the police of blocking peaceful demonstrators from accessing public transit as they attempted to leave for the evening. This led to clashes in shopping malls where the stations were located. Wai Hing-cheung, a district councillor in Shatin, told the media Sunday evening that “I wouldn’t say there was much vandalism taking place, but police used violence against citizens anyway.”

Police wielding pepper spray, batons, and riot shields attacked demonstrators who responded by throwing umbrellas and other objects. At least 28 people were injured, with two in critical condition. Officials claimed ten police officers were hurt. At least 37 people have been arrested so far, though this number may rise. On Monday, both Chief Executive Lam and Police Commissioner Stephen Lo denounced demonstrators as “rioters.” If convicted on these grounds, protesters could face up to ten years in prison.

There is no indication that the protests are coming to an end soon, despite Lam’s attempts to calm anger over the extradition bill. In addition, sources speaking to the *Financial Times* stated that Beijing has rejected several of Lam’s attempts to resign. Instead, the central government, expressing anger over the situation, stated Lam “has to stay to clean up the mess she created.” Beijing has continued to support Lam publicly.

Lam and the government are unable to address the real concerns of the public. A commenter on an online forum at the beginning of July explained what drove many to protest, writing, “Poor working conditions, no flat, no democracy—everything that appears ordinary in other countries is absent in Hong Kong.” According to Oxfam, inequality in the city is at its highest level in 45

years.

Right-wing political tendencies are attempting to scapegoat mainland Chinese. Some protesters at a rally Saturday in Sheung Shui, denounced Hong Kong's parallel traders, or those who purchase goods only available in the city or to avoid taxes for resale on the Chinese mainland. The rally was organized by the North District Parallel Imports Concern Group, which claimed 30,000 people took part, though police reported only 4,000.

In a crude attempt to sow divisions, the traders are blamed for high prices and shortages. This accusation is employed in particular by conservative pan-democrats who have characterized mainland Chinese as "invaders." In reality, it is not mainland Chinese who are responsible but the irrationality of the capitalist system.

Hong Kong protesters should reject this chauvinist and parochial perspective. Their ally in the fight for democratic rights is the Chinese working class, which struggles under the same exploitative, global economic system as workers and youth in the city. A political struggle against the Beijing regime and its lackeys in Hong Kong will only go forward to the extent that the working class throughout China, including Hong Kong, is mobilized on the basis of a fight for genuine socialism.

The conservative opposition in Hong Kong, the so-called pan-democrats, represent layers of big business concerned that Beijing's intrusion into the city will undermine their economic interests and is fundamentally hostile to any mobilization of the working class. As a result, the pan-democrats seek to narrowly restrict the demands of the protests and exclude in particular burning social issues such as social inequality, poverty and the lack of affordable housing that impact on workers.

The United States and Britain have criticized Beijing over the Hong Kong protests, with the UK in particular posing as a defender of its former colony. Some protesters have appealed to these two powers, waving American and British flags during the marches this past week. Some banners called on the US to "liberate Hong Kong."

Neither imperialist power has any regard for democratic rights in Hong Kong or anywhere around the globe. Such appeals will only lead the protest

movement into a dead-end. Whatever their criticisms, Washington and London are only interested in exploiting the protest movement for their own ends. The Trump administration in particular is using the protests as part of its escalating confrontation with China across the board—on trade and economic issues, as well as strategically and militarily.



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