

Protests in Hong Kong continue despite escalating police violence

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Protesters demonstrated for the eighth straight weekend in Hong Kong to denounce police violence and to continue demanding democratic reforms, including the full withdrawal of the controversial extradition bill, the resignation of Chief Executive Carrie Lam, and universal suffrage. Rallies took place in different locations throughout the city.

On Friday, around 15,000 people staged a sit-in protest at the Hong Kong International Airport, expanding their efforts to reach a broader international audience. They occupied two arrival lobbies, distributing leaflets and holding banners. Protesters also gathered more than 14,600 signatures for a petition demanding government authorities arrest the gangsters involved in an attack on protesters going home last Sunday at a train station in Yuen Long.

“We want to share this news with tourists, to let the world know about Hong Kong,” a flight attendant and one of the organizers of the rally told the *South China Morning Post*. “We need the international community. We need people to voice out for us. Maybe on television, you don’t know the full story, but here we have videos and more information and we’re ready to talk to people to explain what is happening,” she said.

Margarita Duco, a 24-year-old tourist from Chile, expressed solidarity with the protesters, saying: “The excessive use of violence when there are peaceful manifestations, it’s very common in my country so I can relate to what they are going through.”

Flight attendants and airport staff, including those just getting off work, joined the demonstration. The Flight Attendants Union of Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong’s largest airline, stated that it encouraged its membership to participate. The union is a member of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, which supports the pan-democrats in the city and has not organized

broader working-class action against the attacks on democratic rights or police violence.

Meryl Yeung, a 29-year-old flight attendant, said it was important to dispel notions people had of the protesters as being nothing but violent. “They have no idea at all, they only get information from one side. They think everyone coming to a protest, to a rally, are all rioters or promoting Hong Kong independence.”

A group of air traffic controllers stated that they could take action if protesters’ demands are not met. “The (Hong Kong) airport is the world’s busiest cargo gateway and one of the world’s busiest passenger airports,” the statement read. It warned there would be a “huge economic loss” if they decided to halt operations.

Further demonstrations took place Saturday in Yuen Long. Rally organizers moved a march planned for Kowloon to the town, but police had not given authorization. Protesters spoke out against the attack carried out the previous week by gangsters affiliated with pro-Beijing lawmaker Junius Ho.

The rally began around 2:30 p.m. and grew to 300,000 participants. By 5:30 p.m., the police moved to disperse the protesters, firing tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd. The authorities attempted to portray the marchers as violent, wielding poles or other makeshift weapons, to justify the sharp escalation in police violence. By the end of the evening, police conducted a baton charge on protesters who were leaving for the evening.

Matthew Lam, an 18-year-old demonstrator, described the scene, saying, “The police rushed in without any warning. They were hitting and hitting, they were beating protesters and regular people continuously for at least 20 seconds.” In total, 24 people were sent to the hospital, with those injured

ranging in age from 15 to 60. An additional 13 people were arrested between the ages of 18 and 68.

Amnesty International condemned the police violence, refuting claims that protesters were responsible for the violence. Man-kei Tam, director of Amnesty International Hong Kong, stated, “There were repeated instances today where police officers were the aggressors; beating retreating protesters, attacking civilians in the train station and targeting journalists.” He added: “Such a heavy-handed response now appears the modus operandi for Hong Kong police and we urge them to quickly change course.”

A similar scene occurred during a smaller demonstration on Sunday of tens of thousands, which began at Chater Garden in the Central district, also to denounce police violence. Police had rejected a request for a second demonstration in Sheung Wan, near Beijing’s liaison office, which last week was surrounded by a few hundred demonstrators who sprayed graffiti on the walls of the building. Police responded to last week’s gathering with tear gas and rubber bullets, far out of proportion to the number of protesters.

After the Chater Garden rally yesterday, approximately 200 protesters began marching towards the liaison office before being stopped by police. A larger group marched towards the Causeway Bay shopping district. Police again used tear gas to disperse the marchers.

Some of the rally participants shouted slogans including, “Reclaim Hong Kong, the revolution of our times,” a phrase used by Edward Leung in the 2016 election. Leung belongs to the right-wing, chauvinist organization Hong Kong Indigenous, which along with similar right-wing groups like Civic Passion, advocates Hong Kong independence. These formations scapegoat mainland Chinese in the city, including children, accusing them of destroying Hong Kong culture and blaming them for the economic crisis facing workers and youth throughout the city.

Civic Passion and Hong Kong Indigenous are just one relatively minor political current in a huge, but rather politically amorphous, movement of youth and working people who are determined to defend democratic rights threatened by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime and the pro-Beijing administration in Hong Kong. The threat of industrial action by air traffic

controllers points to the involvement of the working class and deeper social concerns about poverty, the lack of welfare and housing, and the high cost of living.

The movement in Hong Kong is part of a far broader upsurge of the working class internationally against the austerity agenda of governments and attacks on democratic rights. The persistence of the protests in Hong Kong involving a sizeable proportion of the city’s population is paralleled by the long-running “yellow vest” protests in France and the huge rallies in Puerto Rico that ousted Governor Ricardo Rosselló.

Despite their size and militancy, the protests in Hong Kong lack a clear political perspective. While most protesters reject the anti-Chinese chauvinism of extreme-right groups such as Civic Passion and Hong Kong Indigenous, the prevalence of so-called Hong Kong localism—seeking to preserve Hong Kong’s culture as distinct from mainland China—is a political dead end.

Beijing’s veiled threat last week to use the military to suppress the Hong Kong protests underscores the necessity of a political fight to unify the Chinese working class in Hong Kong and on the mainland where workers also face oppressive social conditions and the ruthless suppression of their democratic rights. Such a struggle against the impact of the worsening crisis of capitalism has to be based on the program of socialist internationalism and the lessons of the historical struggles of the Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International—against Stalinism and Maoism.



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