

General strike by Hong Kong workers against extradition law

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Workers across multiple sectors are due to strike today in Hong Kong in support of the demands of protesters for the government to withdraw its law to allow extradition to the Chinese mainland. The general strike follows nearly two months of massive protests involving a significant proportion of the city's population, amid fears that Beijing will use the law to seize and intimidate political dissidents and critics.

The strike is likely to hit transport, including rail and air services, banking and finance, the civil service and a range of social services. Scores of small businesses, coffee shops and food outlets have announced that they will be shut for the day. Last Thursday hundreds of employees held a brief “flash mob” protest and on Friday thousands of civil servants staged a rally of their own to show their support for strike action.

Estimates of the number of workers who will participate vary widely. At a press conference on Saturday, members of the strike's organising committee told the media that 14,000 workers across more than 20 sectors had signalled their support for the strike and had applied for leave to take part.

A spokesman for the strike's organising committee named Chan condemned the Hong Kong government for failing to listen the demands of the protestors and the police for their use of violence. “When society has become like this, we need to paralyse it temporarily to force the government to face the problems,” he said.

Carol Ng Man-ye, chairwoman of the Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU), suggested that the figure could be far higher. She told the *South China Morning Post*: “This is a citywide strike. Judging from the 1 million turnout for the June 9 march, I reckon the number of people joining the strike might reach 500,000.”

The CTU, which has nearly 200,000 members in affiliated unions, has called for public support for the

strike, but does not appear to have called strike action as such. The union umbrella group is closely aligned with the pan-democrats, the official opposition in the Legislative Council, which is using the protests to try to pressure the pro-Beijing administration for concessions.

Strike organisers said work stoppages would be held in seven districts—Admiralty, Mong Kok, Sha Tin, Tai Po, Wong Tai Sin, Tuen Mun and outside Hong Kong Disneyland. Protesters planned to be present at rail stations, the outlets to the harbour tunnels, and at bus depots so as to encourage passengers to take part in the strike. Unions from five airlines, two in the bus industry and one for the city's railway reportedly called on their members to go on a strike.

More than 20 air traffic controllers from the Civil Aviation Department collectively took sick leave on Sunday, about one-third of the officers on duty. While the department found replacements, air traffic controllers could also join the strike today. According to the *Financial Times*, the airport is expected to reduce flight operations today from two runways to just one, drastically affecting the more than 1,000 commercial flights due to arrive and depart from the city today.

The *Financial Times* also reported that Standard Chartered, one of the largest financial companies in Hong Kong, was effectively turning a blind eye if its employees decided to join the strike. An employee told the newspaper that while the bank had not officially sanctioned the strike, some managers had told staff verbally they would not be penalised for not coming to work.

The strike follows a weekend of protests involving thousands and clashes with police, which included the occupation of a major shopping district on Kowloon. Police stated that they had arrested more than 20 people on suspicion of a range of offences, including assault

and unlawful assembly. On Sunday, protesters staged short impromptu demonstrations in a variety of locations in a bid avoid police repression.

The general strike today is the broadest and possibly the largest industrial action in the city for decades. It signals the entry of the working class on a class basis in the mass protest movement that began in June and also points to the underlying social and economic issues that are driving the opposition.

The stated demands of the protests have included to date: the withdrawal of the extradition legislation, the resignation of Chief Executive Carrie Lam, independent investigations into police violence and the withdrawal of all charges against protesters. The discontent, however, is being further fueled by the lack of affordable housing, social services and employment opportunities particularly for young people, high prices and low wages, as well as the huge social gulf between rich and poor in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

A strike movement in Hong Kong will redouble fears in Beijing where the Chinese Communist Party apparatus is deeply concerned that the protests will spill into mainland China and trigger industrial action over wages, conditions and jobs as well as protests over the lack of basic democratic rights. The Beijing regime has already hinted that it could use military force to suppress the protests.

Last week, the commander of the People's Liberation Army garrison in Hong Kong warned that protests that challenged China's political system were "absolutely intolerable." Over the weekend, China's state-owned news agency Xinhua denounced the continuing protests, specifically criticising protesters who threw a Chinese flag into the harbour. "The central government will not sit by idly and allow the situation to continue," it warned.

The threat of Chinese military intervention underscores the necessity of workers in Hong Kong turning to the working class on the Chinese mainland in a joint struggle for basic democratic and social rights against the CCP regime in Beijing based on the fight for genuine socialism. Such a struggle has to be based on the rejection of all forms of nationalism and xenophobia, particularly the Hong Kong parochialism and chauvinism directed against Chinese mainlanders by some of the political parties and groups involved in

the protests.



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