

Tens of thousands of workers strike throughout Hong Kong

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Strikes and protests spread across Hong Kong yesterday in the fifth consecutive day of demonstrations. The protests against the government have been ongoing for nearly two months, but they have taken on an added significance as the working class has joined in open opposition.

Tens of thousands of workers joined the strike Monday, with teachers and those from the construction, private security, and engineering sectors taking part. Around 2,330 airport workers stopped work yesterday, including air traffic controllers, staff, and flight attendants, more than a week after a previous sit-down rally was held at the Hong Kong International Airport. More than 200 flights were delayed as a result.

Protesters organized eight demonstrations throughout the city, including in the districts of Admiralty, Sha Tin, and Mong Kok. They blocked roads and trains during the morning commute, erecting barriers and moving around the city rather than remaining in one location. The Cross Harbor Tunnel, linking Hong Kong Island with Kowloon, was blocked for the third time since Saturday.

Police responded with tear gas. In some cases, police fired on protesters with rubber bullets, including without warning, from the upper floors of police buildings. A mob of men with poles also attacked demonstrators at North Point, near Causeway Bay. At least two cars rammed barricades as well, leading to injuries.

Angus Lo, a 35-year-old pilot who took part in the day's strike, denounced Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam, saying, "Condemning the violence is really easy. You have to come up with a solution, you're the chief executive. You have to remember, all that's happening these days is basically because back in day one, she refused to listen to us."

Kurt Yau, a 31-year-old teacher, said of the strike, "This is a way to stop people from going to work and I think that's necessary to achieve our goals." High school students joined the demonstrations alongside their teachers.

The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions publicly supported Monday's strike. However, as an ally of the pan-democrats, Hong Kong's official opposition, it has resisted calling for a full general strike throughout the city since the protests began in June. The strikes indicated that workers are looking to break the straitjacket imposed by the unions.

The conscious intervention of the working class is a sign that the demonstrations are moving beyond the original demands of the protesters, that include the complete withdrawal of a controversial extradition bill and the resignation of Carrie Lam. Underlying the protests has been the city's deep social crisis produced by stagnant wage growth, widespread poverty and a chronic shortage of affordable housing that forces hundreds of thousands into cramped and dangerous one room apartments, often illegally built with little regard for safety.

Speaking to CNN, John Carroll of Hong Kong University, compared the current protracted demonstrations to the 1925 general strike in the city and neighboring Guangzhou, when workers' organizations influenced by the Russian Revolution controlled and administered large areas of the cities. While there are significant differences between today and 1925, the strike movement then was the opening shot of a revolutionary upheaval throughout China that was only defeated as a result of the policies of Stalin.

The ruling classes around the globe are deeply fearful of the entrance of the international working class into politics, putting forward its own independent demands

to growing economic and social crises.

The *New York Times*, in a worried piece, quoted Anthony Dapiran, a lawyer and historian in Hong Kong, who warned: “For me the most alarming thing is we’re kind of on a knife’s edge here—open disrespect for the police, police stations being targeted. We are on the cusp of what could be a general breakdown of law and order. It hasn’t gotten there yet, but the government hasn’t done anything to stop it.”

This is a clear call for the Hong Kong government to do whatever is necessary to end the protests before they spiral completely out of control. The ruling class, whether in Asia or the West, is well aware that an eruption of the working class in Hong Kong or anywhere else can encourage workers elsewhere to take action to demand their social and democratic rights.

Carrie Lam also lashed out on Monday, expressing the fear that exists in Beijing. She stated at a press conference, “These actions challenged national sovereignty, threatened ‘one country, two systems’, and would destroy the city’s prosperity and stability.” Lam warned, “This approach [of striking], which some people said was to bring collateral damage, would push Hong Kong onto a path of no return.”

Beijing has repeatedly warned against any action that challenges the “one country, two systems” under which Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997. The state-owned *Global Times* wrote on Sunday in a veiled reference to the United States and Britain, “Illegal activities such as tarnishing the national flag and defacing the emblem prove that these protests using the extradition bill are actually a series of well-planned separatist movements reinforced by foreign forces challenging China’s sovereignty over Hong Kong.”

However, while Washington and its allies will not hesitate to use the Hong Kong protests for their own purposes as the US escalates its economic war and military build-up against China, the Trump administration has to date taken a relatively low-key approach. US President Trump last week joined Beijing in branding the Hong Kong protests as “riots,” and was lauded in the Chinese media.

An administration official speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* last week, stated, “It was made clear down the chain that we need to be measured on Hong Kong.” In other words, Washington fears the spread of protests as well, which could easily erupt throughout the US, as

they already have in Puerto Rico.

The very real danger is that the Chinese Communist Party regime, concerned that the movement will spread to the Chinese mainland, will resort to military force to suppress the protests in Hong Kong—a move that could lead to a bloodbath as happened in response to the Tiananmen Square protests 30 years ago. Workers in Hong Kong can only defend themselves by turning to workers throughout China in a joint struggle on the basis of a genuine socialist perspective to fight for their rights against the Stalinist bureaucracy in Beijing and its allies in Hong Kong.

As such, the door is open for the military to be called in to put down the demonstrations in what could only lead to a bloodbath on par with the Tiananmen Square massacre, which also took place as the working class moved into open opposition to the Stalinist CCP and the latter’s moves to restore capitalism in China.



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