

# Hong Kong protests continue into a tenth week

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Thousands of people defied a police ban and took part in protests in multiple areas of Hong Kong over the weekend. Heavily-armed riot police used tear gas and batons to attempt to intimidate protesters, resulting in injuries and arrests.

The Hong Kong protests have now entered their 10th week and the demands have expanded. Plans to introduce legislation enabling extradition to China sparked huge protests, as large as two million people, amid fears that the Beijing regime would use the law to silence critics and dissidents in Hong Kong.

While Chief Secretary Carrie Lam has suspended the bill, protesters are demanding that the legislation be completely withdrawn and that Lam resigns. Other demands include the withdrawal of charges against arrested protesters, an independent inquiry into police violence, and free elections based on universal suffrage for Hong Kong's legislative and administrative bodies.

Last Monday, after a weekend of protests, tens of thousands of workers responded to a call for a general strike that affected transport, services and the financial and banking sector. While the opposition-aligned Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) gave verbal support for the strike, its leaders did not call out the nearly 200,000 members of its affiliated unions.

Yesterday protests occurred in a number of locations in Hong Kong, with protesters, many of whom are young, playing cat-and-mouse with police. At one railway station, riot police fired tear gas into the enclosed space and were caught on film using batons to beat protesters as they tried to flee down an escalator to another station.

According to the *South China Morning Post*, "Parts of Tsim Sha Tsui, Sham Shui Po, Wan Chai and Kwai Chung became smoking war zones once again on Sunday, with protesters continuing their new hit-and-

run tactics to stay one step ahead of police who responded to bricks and petrol bombs with barrages of tear gas and baton charges."

The newspaper cited the Hospital Authority as reporting that, as of 11.30 p.m., 13 people had been injured in protests and sent to hospitals across the city. Nine had been discharged, but a man and woman were still in serious condition.

The Hong Kong administration branded the protests as "unlawful assemblies" and said a petrol bomb had injured a policeman. A spokesman declared that there was "no longer any fixed period of time or fixed locations for these persistent and large-scale illegal and violent acts."

The police have arrested some 600 people since the protests began in early June. Some face riot charges that carry a prison term of 10 years.

The Beijing regime has strongly hinted several times that it could use the Chinese military to suppress the protests. Last Tuesday in the wake of the general strike, Yang Guang, spokesman for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, declared that "radical protests" were endangering the city's prosperity and stability.

Yang claimed that the mass protest movement was the work of a "very small group of unscrupulous and violent criminals and the dirty forces behind them" and chillingly warned: "Those who play with fire will perish by it."

Last Thursday and Friday, China's state-owned media circulated a photo of Julie Eaden, political unit chief of the US consulate general in Hong Kong, meeting in a hotel lobby with prominent opposition leaders, including Joshua Wong, a student leader in the so-called umbrella protests in 2014. The reports declared that the photo was evidence of a US "black

hand” in the protest seeking to foment a “colour revolution” in Hong Kong.

Beijing and Washington traded insults over the release of the photo, with a US State Department spokeswoman accusing China of being “thuggish” and claiming that Eaden had just been doing her job. The Chinese foreign ministry in Hong Kong declared that those remarks revealed the “dark and twisted side of US psychology.”

As the US ramps up its economic war and military build-up in the region against China, Washington is clearly watching the situation in Hong Kong very closely and calculating how to exploit it. Nevertheless, the response of the Trump administration and the American media to the Hong Kong protests has been relatively low key, unlike the strident propaganda that has been associated with US-driven “colour revolutions” in the past.

Moreover, the protests themselves have involved a significant proportion of the Hong Kong population and have taken place largely outside of the involvement of the official opposition in the city—the so-called pan-democrat grouping in the Legislative Council.

The entry of the working class of Hong Kong into the protest movement has not only provoked fears in Beijing but also concerns in Washington and among US allies amid a resurgence of the class struggle internationally. The US has been confronting widespread opposition of its own in the US territory of Puerto Rico.

Undoubtedly there are illusions among the Hong Kong protesters, encouraged by the pan-democrats and some student leaders such as Joshua Wong, that the US and its allies, Britain in particular, will intervene on their behalf. Such an intervention, were it to take place, would have nothing to do with defending democratic rights in Hong Kong, but would be aimed at prosecuting US imperialist interests and undermining China.

China’s denunciations of Washington’s “black hand” is a warning that it is preparing a pretext to crack down on the Hong Kong demonstrators. It has already exerted pressure on Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways to take disciplinary action against its employees who have supported the protests.

The airline has sacked two ground crew for allegedly leaking the travel arrangements of a Hong Kong police

football team travelling to the mainland. It has also suspended a pilot for “misconduct” after he took part in protests and was charged with rioting. Cathay Pacific also announced that it would comply with a ban imposed by Beijing on all staff who support the protests from working on flights to the Chinese mainland or through its airspace.

The biggest shareholder in the airline is the Swire Group, chaired by the British billionaire Barnaby Swire. Its chief executive Rupert Hogg told the media that Cathay Pacific’s operations to mainland China were “key to our business” and the airline had no intention of jeopardising its profits.

Air traffic controllers and airline staff, including pilots, took part in the protests and strike last Monday, which affected some 200 flights. A sit-in protest at Hong Kong’s international airport continued into its third day yesterday, with about a 1,000 demonstrators handing out flyers to arriving travellers.



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