

Trump backs China's handling of Hong Kong protests

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Amid continuing large protests in Hong Kong over democratic rights, US President Trump again signalled his support for Beijing, saying that “I think great progress has been made by China in Hong Kong.”

Trump, who was speaking on Friday after meeting with China's top trade negotiator Liu He, declared that the limited US-China trade agreement just reached would be “a great deal for the people of Hong Kong.”

Trump declared that he had discussed Hong Kong with Liu, telling him that the protests had “toned down a lot from the initial days of a number of months ago when I saw a lot of people... it really had de-escalated a lot.”

Far from suggesting any intervention by the US in support of the protests, Trump declared that the situation was “going to take care of itself.”

The comments underscore concerns in ruling circles in the US and around the world about the potential for the protracted Hong Kong protests to trigger such movements elsewhere. While the Chinese government has claimed that the demonstrations are the work of the “black hand” of the US, the Trump administration has offered no public support.

Trump's latest remarks follow similar ones in August when he branded the protests as riots, insisting that “Hong Kong is part of China, they'll have to deal with that themselves.”

Trump's comments demonstrate once again that US imperialism, far from being committed to defending democratic rights, cynically and selectively exploits “human rights” as the means for prosecuting its own economic and strategic interests, including as the pretext for war.

A right wing layer of protest leaders has deliberately sought to divert the movement into futile appeals to the US, as well as Hong Kong's former colonial ruler,

Britain. In early September, in the immediate aftermath of a second strike involving tens of thousands of workers, protesters marched to the US Consulate waving American flags and singing the Star-spangled Banner.

Trump's comments provoked debate among protestors on social media. The *South China Morning Post* reported one as saying: “Trump thinks we would pack it in. We still want to count on the Americans?” Another was more emphatic: “I have said western countries would only view Hong Kong as their pawn. Don't be so naïve that they value the so-called ‘values of democracy and freedoms’.”

The protests, now in their fifth month, continued over the weekend, with many participants wearing face masks in defiance of a government ban imposed on October 5. Hong Kong's top official, Chief Executive Carrie Lam, invoked a draconian British colonial era law, the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, to impose the ban.

The ban on face masks, which can result in penalties of up to a year in prison and fines of up to \$HK25,000 (\$US3,188), is the thin end of the wedge. By declaring the situation in Hong Kong as an emergency, the Ordinance gives Lam sweeping powers to make any regulation deemed to be in the “public interest.”

As of last Tuesday, police had arrested 77 protesters for wearing masks. Since the protests began in early June, police have arrested more than 2,300. Some have been charged with “rioting” which carries a penalty of up to 10 years in jail.

While Lam has accused the protesters of violence and vandalism, it is the police that have become increasingly brutal in their methods, including the use of water cannon, tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and recently the firing of live rounds. The police have

also infiltrated plain clothes officers as spies and provocateurs into the protests.

While the government has played down injuries, an Associated Press article indicated last week that many go unreported. A group of volunteer medical professionals known as the Hidden Clinic treats injured protesters who are concerned about the consequences of going to a public hospital.

AP wrote: “The Hidden Clinic says it has clandestinely treated 300-400 protesters with an array of injuries: broken and dislocated bones, gaping wounds and exposure to tear gas so prolonged that they were coughing up blood. It also says the severity of injuries has increased sharply in the past week.”

The Hong Kong protests began over legislation that would have allowed extradition to China, including potentially critics and political opponents of Beijing on trumped up charges. While the law has now been formally withdrawn, concern remains that the pro-Beijing administration in Hong Kong is committed to the suppression of opposition.

Protest leaders are demanding free elections based on universal suffrage as well as an independent inquiry into police violence and the dropping of charges against protesters.

Last week Lam refused to rule out calling on China to directly intervene with paramilitary police and troops. While saying that her administration could handle the protests, Lam warned: “But if the situation becomes so bad, then no options are ruled out, if we want Hong Kong to at least have another chance.”

Speaking during a state visit to Nepal yesterday, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared: “Anyone attempting to split China in any part of the country will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones... And any external forces backing such attempts dividing China will be deemed by the Chinese people as pipe-dreaming!”

Xi’s remarks are directed not only at Hong Kong, where right wing groups call for its independence, but at Xinjiang and Tibet where the US has been actively promoting separatist groups. Nevertheless, it is a chilling warning to Hong Kong protesters that recalls the brutal use of the military in 1989 to crush mass protests by students and workers in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square and in other Chinese cities. Xi was undoubtedly encouraged by Trump’s comments last

Friday, effectively ruling out US intervention.

Young people and workers in Hong Kong need to draw their own conclusions. It is not to Washington and London that they should turn, but to the working class throughout China which confronts the same issues—the suppression of basic democratic rights amid a worsening economic and social crisis.

Basic democratic and social rights can only be achieved through unified struggle of workers against the Beijing regime on the basis of a genuine socialist program, as part of the fight for socialism internationally.



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