

Hong Kong protests defy police violence and mass arrests

Mike Head**13 November 2019**

As Hong Kong this week enters its sixth month of continuous demonstrations demanding basic democratic rights, there are signs that the increased repression ordered by Beijing is bringing the uprising to a critical turning point. Pitched battles between protesters and police erupted in almost 50 locations on Monday and Tuesday, paralysing some key areas.

Escalated police violence—including the shooting of a demonstrator at point-blank range on Monday and a full-scale attack on students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Tuesday—appears to have reinforced the popular support for the protests and their five demands, setting the stage for an even-more bloody confrontation.

Since Chinese President Xi Jinping met his government's Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam in Shanghai on November 4, the regime's drive to suppress the protests has risen to a new level. Xi publicly endorsed Lam's refusal to meet, or negotiate on, the mass movement's demands, while insisting on "unswerving efforts to stop and punish violent activities."

The immediate trigger for this week's widespread clashes was Monday's police live-fire shooting of a 21-year-old student, who remains in hospital in a critical condition. It followed the death last Friday of student demonstrator Alex Chow Tsz-lok, who fell from a multi-storey car park while fleeing police tear gas the previous weekend.

Amid vicious baton charges and tear gas barrages, police arrested 287 people on Monday, the highest number of arrests in a single day since the protests started in June, and at least 128 people were injured.

An extraordinary police assault was then conducted at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Tuesday, turning the campus into a battlefield for three hours.

Police fired volleys of rubber bullets, teargas and a water cannon, defying on-the-spot pleas by both the university's president and pro vice-chancellor to withdraw to allow negotiations. Students demanded the release of those arrested on campus earlier in the day, with at least one reported to be facing a charge of rioting that carries up to 10 years in jail.

Riot police also fired teargas on demonstrators gathered in Hong Kong's central business district and other universities on Tuesday. Protesters built street barricades, set fires and threw petrol bombs, chairs and other objects at police. In the city centre, thousands of demonstrators, including black-clad protesters and office workers, held up hands to signal the five demands and heckled police, calling them "murderers."

A group of academics from across Hong Kong's universities, the Scholars' Alliance for Academic Freedom, denounced the police incursions onto multiple university campuses, saying these were places where thousands of students lived and studied and were permitted to hold gatherings.

More than 3,000 people have been arrested since the protests began in June, initially triggered by a bill that would have allowed the extradition of suspects in Hong Kong to mainland China. But despite the bill being suspended, tens of thousands of people, led by students, are continuing to demand democratic elections, universal suffrage, an inquiry into the police violence and the dropping of all the charges against protesters.

To justify their stepped-up repression, police chiefs accused protesters of bringing the city to the "brink of total collapse," while warning residents they would be "accomplices" if they continued to support the demonstrations. Likewise, on Monday, Lam said the protesters were enemies of the people and rebuked "any wishful thinking" that their tactics would push the

government to accede to their demands.

On Tuesday, the Chinese Communist Party's official newspaper, the *People's Daily*, published a commentary online defending Monday's police shooting as "reasonable and legal." It demanded that Hong Kong's government "double down" on support for the police "to carry out more effective and harsher crackdown on the riots." It said an end to the protests was a prerequisite for holding any "fair elections" in Hong Kong, including district council elections scheduled for November 24.

The comments are in line with a directive passed at a recent meeting of the CCP's central leadership, which vowed to support Hong Kong to "strengthen law enforcement power."

Simultaneously on Tuesday, the Chinese state-run *Global Times* described the protesters as "no different from terrorists like Islamic State." The editorial stressed the readiness of the People's Liberation Army—the Chinese military—and Chinese police to reinforce Hong Kong's security forces when needed.

"Behind you are not only the people of Hong Kong and the whole country who love Hong Kong, but also the national armed police force and the troops stationed in Hong Kong," the editorial claimed.

The truth is that the mass movement's legitimate demands for democratic rights, and underlying concerns over lack of access to safe and affordable housing and decent paying jobs in a city dominated by billionaires, are shared by working people across China, as well as globally.

Huge protests are taking place around the world—from Lebanon and Iraq to Chile—against the soaring social inequality and assaults on jobs, wages, basic services and living conditions, while strikes by workers are developing in the United States and Britain.

It is to this emerging international rebellion, as well as the struggles of Chinese workers, that students and workers in Hong Kong need to turn for support and coordinated action. There must be no illusions in the reactionary appeals made by some elements for backing from the US or British governments, which have permitted Beijing to falsely blame the protests on "outside forces."

From US President Donald Trump to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, there is not the slightest concern for democratic rights in Hong Kong, or

anywhere else. On the contrary, the fear in capitalist ruling circles is that the uprising in Hong Kong has been a factor in the working-class resistance erupting around the world, and can inspire similar movements in their own countries.

Statements issued by Washington and London on Tuesday struck almost identical tones. US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus called for "restraint" by protesters, as well as police. Johnson's office urged the Chinese regime to find a solution. "We want to see the Hong Kong authorities agree a path to resolve this situation," Downing Street said.

The way forward for the Hong Kong students and workers lies in unifying their struggle with those of the working class globally against their common exploiters in the capitalist class—including the fraudulently labelled Chinese "communist" regime—and fighting for genuine international socialism.



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