

Beijing passes anti-democratic security law for Hong Kong

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China's National People's Congress Standing Committee on Tuesday passed a controversial national security law for Hong Kong that will allow the central government to crackdown on political dissent in the city and further curtail democratic rights. The new law took effect Tuesday night, shortly before the 23rd anniversary of the United Kingdom's handover of Hong Kong to China.

Beijing stated the law is necessary to counter "foreign forces," which it has blamed for the protests that erupted in Hong Kong last summer. An "Office for Safeguarding National Security" will be set up in the city that will allow Beijing's judicial system to take over criminal cases where there is supposed foreign interference, it is deemed a particularly serious case, or if authorities believe there is a threat to national security.

The four types of criminal designations under the new law include subversion, secession, terrorism and colluding with foreign forces. The law states, for example, that anyone who damages government facilities, which became the targets of public anger in protests last year, could be charged with subversion. Workers who attempt to shut down public transportation in a citywide strike could face terrorism charges. Penalties for a conviction range from a minimum of 10 years in prison to life behind bars.

The law has already been used to attack the democratic rights of Hong Kong people. On Wednesday, thousands gathered to mark the anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China as well as to speak out against the legislation. Police used water cannon, tear gas, and pepper spray to break up the demonstrations and arrested nearly 200 people, at least seven specifically under the new law.

The legislation will undoubtedly be used to suppress

mass protests like those that erupted last year against planned extradition legislation. While millions of people in Hong Kong concerned about China's encroachment on democratic rights joined the demonstrations, the movement was hijacked by protest leaders who appealed to US and British imperialism to intervene to defend democratic rights. This has created the pretext for Beijing to ram through the latest national security legislation.

The US and its allies, including Britain and Australia, are now cynically posturing as defenders of human rights in Hong Kong and denouncing the new legislation. Their concern, however, is not the erosion of democratic rights, but to exploit the issue to further ratchet up their confrontation with Beijing. The Trump administration has already announced that it intends to end the special status of Hong Kong that continued after its return to China in 1997.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted on Wednesday, "The CCP's draconian national security law ends free Hong Kong and exposes the Party's greatest fear: the free will and free thinking of its own people." The previous day, he tweeted that the US was ending its limited weapon exports to Hong Kong as well as the sale of sensitive technologies, declaring, "If Beijing now treats Hong Kong as 'One Country, One System,' so must we."

US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross warned of more economic penalties: "Further actions to eliminate differential treatment are also being evaluated. We urge Beijing to immediately reverse course and fulfil the promises it has made to the people of Hong Kong and the world."

The rank hypocrisy of such comments is underscored by the Trump administration's response to sustained mass protests in the US against police violence. Last

month Trump attempted to mount a coup announcing that he would deploy the military to suppress the demonstrations in a naked breach of the US constitution.

Trump's denunciations of China are in part to deflect attention from his administration's criminal negligence towards the COVID-19 pandemic that is responsible for the deaths of more than 130,000 Americans. Without a shred of evidence he has blamed China for the pandemic even accusing it of releasing the virus from a Wuhan virology laboratory.

Trump's virulent anti-China campaign, however, is a continuation of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" to undermine and ultimately subordinate what Washington regards as the chief threat to its global dominance. Hong Kong is just one of the flash points in the Indo-Pacific that the US is deliberately inflaming, including Taiwan, the South China Sea and India's border conflict with China.

In an editorial on Tuesday, the state-owned *Global Times* criticized the US for declaring the new security legislation marked the end of "one country, two systems" under which Hong Kong was guaranteed limited autonomy after returned to China. It declared that there was "a malicious scheme to pull Hong Kong from China into the US power circle and turn the city into a fulcrum for the US to contain China."

While Beijing has concerns about imperialist intrigues in Hong Kong, its chief fear is that social and political unrest in the city over democratic and social rights will spill over the border into the rest of China. Hong Kong is one of the most socially unequal cities in the world and the eruption of strikes and protests has the potential to trigger anti-government opposition in China where the economy has slowed dramatically and social tensions have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Officially 5.9 percent of the Chinese workforce is unemployed, down slightly from a record high of 6.2 percent in February, a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, according to Wei Yao and Michelle Lam, economists at Société Générale, some 10 percent of those considered employed are in fact out of work—meaning as many as 80 million workers are without employment. "The Covid-19 shock to the job market is unprecedented in its scale, length and nature," Yao and Lam wrote in May.

Another 600 million workers are highly exploited, earning just 1,000 yuan a month, or \$US140 which is not even enough to rent a room in a medium-sized city. Students and workers whether on the mainland or in Hong Kong face the same conditions: unemployment or low-paying jobs, unsafe housing, and brutal social inequality.

It is to the working class throughout China that those fighting for democratic rights in Hong have to turn, not to US and British imperialism. Only a unified movement of workers in China and internationally can defend democratic and social rights on the basis of a struggle for genuine socialism.



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