

Hong Kong authorities arrest opposition legislators in further crackdown

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Authorities in Hong Kong are continuing their crackdown on opposition figures following the passage of a new national security law on June 30.

On Wednesday, two lawmakers from the Democratic Party were arrested for their alleged involvement in protests last year against a controversial extradition bill. The Democrats are the largest party in the pan-democrat bloc, which acts as the official opposition in the city's political establishment.

Ted Hui and Lam Cheuk-ting, the two arrested legislators, face charges of conspiracy to damage property and obstruction of justice in Tuen Mun on July 6 of last year.

Turning reality on its head, Lam was also charged with rioting on July 21 last year in Yuen Long in connection with an attack in a subway station by pro-Beijing thugs and triad gangsters on protesters returning home from a rally. Lam was a victim in the assault and received injuries as a result.

Wu Chi-wai, the chairman of the Democratic Party, condemned the detentions, stating: "We can easily draw the conclusion that the arrests are revenge against them." He added an appeal, saying: "The Democrats reiterate that the abuse of power [of the authorities] will not help solve Hong Kong's difficulties, and call on those in power to change their ways."

The police and pro-Beijing politicians have been accused of colluding with the gangsters, who used metal and wooden poles to carry out their attacks.

After last year's assaults, Julius Ho, a prominent pro-Beijing politician, was recorded shaking hands with some assailants, giving them thumbs-ups and later referring to them as his friends. Ho had the audacity to say after Wednesday's arrests: "Justice may be late but never absent."

Despite video evidence to the contrary, police

superintendent Chan Tin-chu claimed Wednesday there was a "vigorous fight" that day in Yuen Long between two supposedly equal sides, and denounced the victims as rioters. He claimed that the video footage of the attack was "biased."

Witnesses stated shortly after the July 21 attack that the gangsters attacked people indiscriminately, including people simply returning home from work and even children.

"It's groundless to say barehanded people were fighting with assaulters armed with metal rods," Yuen Long district councillor Tommy Cheung said in response to the new charges. "The government is trying to distort the history... but I believe people in Hong Kong can remember the truth."

Currently, it is unclear if the two arrested lawmakers will also be charged under the national security law, which includes four types of criminal offences: subversion, secession, terrorism and colluding with foreign forces.

Since the law's passage, four students connected to a minor pro-Hong Kong independence group were the first to be arrested on July 29 this year.

On 10 August, 10 people were arrested in a more high-profile police action whose targets included Jimmy Lai, the billionaire owner of the New Digital media company, and activists Andy Li and Agnes Chow. Li was arrested again last Sunday with 10 others on a ship off the coast of Hong Kong, allegedly attempting to flee to Taiwan.

Hong Kong authorities have disbarred 12 prominent opposition politicians from running in the Legislative Council elections, which were originally slated for this month, but have been postponed one year, ostensibly in response to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

The continuing attack on basic democratic rights in

Hong Kong is a serious warning to the working class and youth. On one hand, Beijing is sending a message to the population that renewed protests will result in more arrests, with an average youth undoubtedly facing much harsher conditions than a billionaire like Jimmy Lai and others with influential connections.

On the other hand, the pan-democrat bloc is demonstrating that it has no intention of waging a genuine fight for democracy. Democratic Party leader Wu offered little more than a moral appeal for the authorities to “change their ways” after the recent arrests. Nothing in his statement suggested the pan-democrats will lead a renewed protest movement, let alone call for a struggle of workers in defence of their social rights.

In fact, the pan-democrat bloc has always served the interests of big business in Hong Kong, advocating accommodation to Beijing to one degree or another, while giving voice to sections of the city’s bourgeoisie that feels the central government is encroaching too far on their business interests. They, along with many of the student activists given prominence by the media, look to Washington and London in the hopes of pressuring Beijing, while being hostile to the genuine democratic aspirations of the working class and youth.

Furthermore, figures like Lai, whom the bourgeois media is hailing as a tireless defender for democracy, does in fact have close ties to the US government. His longtime assistant Mark Simon is a former US naval intelligence officer with connections to the CIA. Simon has aided Lai in securing meetings over the past several years with top officials in Washington including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Vice President Mike Pence and former National Security Advisor John Bolton.

These representatives of US imperialism do not support democratic rights in Hong Kong or anywhere else. Their only interest is in exploiting the Hong Kong unrest to further the US drive to prevent China from challenging the post-World War II hegemony of Washington across the Asia-Pacific region and globally.

Beijing is chiefly concerned that any apparent opposition could, however inadvertently, trigger a new wave of protests that not only brings Hong Kong’s working class into open struggle, but also unites it with the rest of the Chinese working class on the mainland

against the increasingly socially-polarised capitalist state presided over by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The issues that motivated last year’s protests and brought millions on to Hong Kong’s streets have not been resolved. These include widespread inequality, low and stagnant wages, and a lack of safe and affordable housing.

According to official numbers, one in five Hong Kongers lives below the poverty line. On the mainland, an estimated 80 million workers were without employment in May, while another 600 million were making only \$140 a month.

A genuine defence of democratic, social and economic rights in Hong Kong requires the city’s working class and progressive youth to turn to their class brothers and sisters throughout China, Asia and internationally in a united struggle for genuine socialism. This is what Beijing fears the most.



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