

Hong Kong police carry out largest arrests since imposition of national security law

Ben McGrath
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In a dragnet on Wednesday, the Hong Kong police carried out the arrest of 53 politicians and activists associated with the city's official political opposition, the pan-democrat bloc. The arrests are the largest since Beijing passed a national security law last June, designed to stamp out dissent in the city following the eruption of large-scale, pro-democracy protests during the summer of 2019.

The city's police mobilized over 1,000 officers to carry out Wednesday's arrests, raiding 72 locations, including four media outlets. Those arrested are being charged with subversion under the national security law. Penalties for convictions range from a minimum of ten years behind bars to life in prison.

Many of those detained are longstanding figures within Hong Kong political establishment, including Benny Tai, a key figure of the 2014 "Occupy" movement; and James To and Claudia Mo, of the Democratic Party and Hong Kong First respectively. Another of the detained former lawmakers, Lam Cheuk-ting, was previously arrested in August under accusations of rioting in 2019. In reality, Lam had been the victim of an attack by pro-Beijing gangsters. John Clancey, a human rights lawyer and US citizen, was also arrested.

Joshua Wong, one of the most prominent youth activists in Hong Kong, was also charged under the national security law for the first time. Police had already jailed Wong on separate charges prior to this week's raids. In early December, he was sentenced to more than 13 months in prison for taking part in protests deemed unlawful in 2019.

Among the targeted media was the tabloid *Apple Daily*, which is published by Next Digital Media and founded by Jimmy Lai. Lai has vocally criticized Beijing while posturing as a pro-democracy advocate.

He has also been jailed under the national security law after being arrested in August. Lai has longstanding connections with the US intelligence agencies and state department. He has held meetings with figures like Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Hong Kong's secretary for security John Lee indicated that more arrests could be coming, saying investigations were ongoing. "The government will not tolerate subversion of state power. This is severe, and we will prosecute accordingly," He stated.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated that the arrests were necessary to prevent "external forces and individuals colluding to undermine China's stability and security." Since the beginning of the 2019 protests, Beijing has sought to blame foreign interference for the source of public anger, rather than to acknowledge declining living and working conditions and attacks on basic democratic rights that animate working-class discontent throughout China.

The Beijing bureaucracy's greatest fear is that workers in Hong Kong will break out of the control of the pan-democrats and move to assert their own independent interests and spark the latent opposition within the huge working class on the Chinese mainland.

The arrested include those who ran in an unofficial primary last year, organized to determine which opposition candidates would stand in the general election originally slated for September. More than 600,000 people participated, exceeding expectations.

The Hong Kong government postponed the election in July citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext. Wednesday's arrests therefore make it clearer that the postponement was motivated by political considerations, with the city government and Beijing

fearing a landslide victory for the pan-democrats.

Wednesday's arrests follow the sentencing of 10 people accused of violating border laws while attempting to flee Hong Kong for Taiwan. They were arrested by the Chinese coast guard on August 23 in a boat outside of Hong Kong waters, according to Chinese authorities. They were given sentences ranging from seven months to three years in jail on the mainland.

Two minors also arrested at the time were returned to Hong Kong in police custody. The government tried the group on December 28 in a closed, one-day trial. One of those arrested in August, Andy Li, is an activist who had also been charged with violating the national security law.

Washington has responded to the latest arrests with its standard hypocritical rhetoric. Antony Blinken, President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for secretary of state said on Twitter, "The sweeping arrests of pro-democracy demonstrators are an assault on those bravely advocating for universal rights. The Biden-Harris administration will stand with the people of Hong Kong and against Beijing's crackdown on democracy."

This is in contrast to Biden and the Democratic Party's response to the ongoing threat of a coup in Washington, led by President Trump. Prior to the violent assault by fascist rioters on the Capital on Wednesday, the Democrats did everything possible to downplay the threat to democratic rights and the Constitution. Washington has no genuine concern for democracy, but instead sees Hong Kong as another means to undermine China, in an attempt to force it to accept US hegemony.

Hong Kong's pan-democrats similarly have no real concern for the democratic rights of the city's workers and youth. They are a coalition of different parties, trade unions, and organizations, headed by the Democratic Party, that represent sections of the Hong Kong bourgeoisie. These layers desire closer economic ties with the US and other Western powers and resent Beijing's impact on their business interests. While some groupings within the pan-democrats attempt to appear radical or even socialist, they seek to pressure Beijing into making an accommodation.

The pan-democrats are just as hostile to the working class as Beijing. In fact, their duplicity has helped

paved the way for Beijing's crackdown. In 2019 when workers were beginning to join the protest movement, the pan-democrats responding by indicating that, on one hand, they would be willing to accept an agreement with the government, and on the other, utilizing anti-Chinese and pro-US slogans to obfuscate the real causes of the protests and push the movement to the right.

Hong Kong's official opposition demonstrated it would not launch any serious fight for democratic rights which would involve mobilizing the working class throughout China to directly challenge the Chinese Communist Party regime. Beijing took this as its cue to crack down on opposition figures. Those genuinely wanting to defend democratic rights can place no faith in the pan-democrats and should instead turn to the working class in Hong Kong and throughout China and internationally.



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