

Universal suffrage: Thousands of Hong Kong students hold large pro-democracy rally on the first day of class boycott

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Today Hong Kong university students marked the beginning of their week long class boycott for democracy by holding a large rally organised at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The students are boycotting classes this week in protest against the decision made by Chinese Communist Party at the end of last month to refuse to grant Hong Kong full universal suffrage and instead require that candidates for the city's Chief Executive be selected by a 1200 person nomination committee.

The students' boycott is demanding that the authorities adopt civil nominations in the 2017 Chief Executive election, reform the Legislative Council by abolishing the functional constituencies, and apologize to HK people and take back the political reform package. In the case that the authorities refuse to fulfil these requirements they demand that Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and other leading officials should resign. In outlining their demands the Hong Kong Federation of Students has also stated that they will escalate their actions if the government does not respond to the boycott and "use the power of the people to return the power to the people".

Students from 26 higher education institutions in Hong Kong are boycotting classes. The rally this afternoon was organised by the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and, according to the organisers, an estimated 13,000 students were thought to have taken part. Students brought banners with slogans including, "Self determination for Hong Kong", "Continue non-violent struggle and fight for civil nomination", "Resist colonization and oppose selection from the top", "Either we break our silence and let our anger erupt or we will be eliminated in silence" (from Lu Xun) and "Representative government alone is not enough, we also need to protect people's livelihoods".

At the rally student union leaders condemned the decision made by the NPC on August 31st. One student leader described how even after the end of British Colonial rule in 1997, the Hong Kong political system has just been a copy of the colonial system and has continued to serve the tycoons. The Hong Kong government's failure to implement the universal pension scheme and standard working hours was also criticised. In discussing the importance of their taking action the HKFS Chair also said that "We are not speculators, we are the guardians of destiny". Students from several different universities and academic disciplines also spoke at the rally, including several who were among the 511 people arrested taking part in the Occupy Central protest on July 2nd. Many of the speakers emphasised how they were taking part due to their being Hong Kong citizens, their love for Hong Kong and their desire for it to achieve democracy. The rally was also addressed by a group of university lecturers who promised the students that they would continue to support them for as long as they wanted to continue their protests for democracy. Former student's union activists from different generations also spoke at the rally to show support for the protest actions being taken by the current generation of students.

The university students plan to continue the boycott of classes all week, with secondary school students also planning to join in and hold a one day class boycott on Friday. Having adopted the slogan of 'boycott classes, don't boycott learning', a program of public lectures has been organised

to begin from tomorrow and to take place each day this week outside government headquarters at which more than 100 academics and other supporters have volunteered to speak. Occupy Central then plans to hold another mass demonstration on October 1st.

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