

Hong Kong: “Normalisation” crosses a decisive threshold

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A huge desire for freedom and democracy was expressed in Hong Kong in 2019. For the government, it is now time for revenge and to bring the population into line with the standards in force on the Chinese mainland. The new electoral rules promulgated on 30 March aim to complete the elimination of all forms of counter-power.

A colonial-style executive power

During colonial times, the British governor held all executive power. After 1997, this power was transferred to a “Hong Kong Executive”, which was totally at the orders of the Beijing regime. The method of appointment to the post of Chief Executive promulgated on 30 March makes the lack of autonomy of the “Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region” even clearer.

A legislative power totally at the behest of the government

Founded in 1843, the Legislative Council’s sole function was to assist the colonial governor. Until 1985, it was composed entirely of members directly appointed by the British government.

In 1991, the right to elect 30% of the members of this institution by direct universal suffrage was granted to the Hong Kong population. In substance, nothing changed: the other seats were allocated according to a highly complex system that allowed the majority to continue to benefit supporters of the power in London and then in Beijing.

The percentage of lawmakers elected by universal suffrage was then gradually increased to reach 50% in 2004, then 57% in 2012 if we add the 5 MPs now elected by indirect suffrage.

Following the 2019 mobilisations, the spectre of losing control of the legislature haunts the government. In the local elections of 24 November 2019, the opposition won 86% of the seats with 57% of the vote. If this feat were to be repeated in the legislative elections initially scheduled for 6 September 2020, the opposition would gain a majority in the Legislative Council.

To prevent this from happening, the government in Beijing postponed the elections at the last moment. It has just put a lasting end to such a possibility by granting itself, on 30 March 2021, the right:

- 1) to refuse any candidacy that does not suit it, whatever the type of election;
- 2) to reduce the percentage of MPs subject to universal suffrage from 57% to 22%.

After having constituted a platform for the opposition between 1991 and 2020, the Legislative Council has resumed the function it had for 154 years under the British monarchy, this time in the service of the Beijing regime.

A domesticated judiciary

One of Hong Kong’s particularities was the existence of freedom of expression and organisation, as well as the respect of legal rules that do not exist in mainland China.

Since the promulgation of the “national security” law on 30 June 2020, all this has been largely

called into question: it is now possible to hold trials in camera, to hand down sentences that can go as far as life imprisonment, to transfer any suspect to the mainland to be tried and imprisoned there, to dismiss civil servants for having expressed an opinion, to restrict the freedom of the press, etc.

Fierce repression

- As of 31 January, the number of opponents being prosecuted was over 2,300 (for a population nine times smaller than that of France!). Trials are already scheduled until 2023;
- Many of the main spokespersons of all shades of the opposition are in prison, on bail or in exile. Leading trade union leaders are behind bars or in the process of being put behind bars, such as the chairwoman and general secretary of the HKCTU, as well as the chairwoman of the HAEA union for public hospital staff;
- The level of organisation of opponents has declined significantly: to avoid prosecution, a number of organisations have disbanded and the coalition that organised the major demonstrations in 2019 is breaking up.

Faced with this situation, solidarity is more than ever essential with the victims of repression, whether in Hong Kong or in exile.

P.S.

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