

# The Hong Kong Revolt Now in its Six Months

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After the four days battle between the Chinese University students and the police between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November, big clashes broke out yesterday, 17<sup>th</sup> of November. Hundreds of riot police besieged the Polytechnic University, and until this moment of writing the siege is still going on.

The great Anti-Extradition Bill Movement succeeded in finally forcing Carrie Lam's administration to withdraw the bill on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

Yet this has failed to calm down the movement not only because there are still four demands left unanswered but also because, in the course of three months, the movement thoroughly exposed the CCP's real intention of hollowing out all the substance of Hong Kong's autonomy and replacing it with Beijing's direct control, down to the command of the local police and mafia.

This explains why the government imposed the anti-mask bill a month later followed by regular banning of demonstration.

Yet people defied the ban and continue with their illegal marches. The movement has evolved into a big battle to defend Hong Kong's autonomy.

On 11<sup>th</sup> November there was a call for strike and class boycott. The fight between the students and the police within the days of 11-14<sup>th</sup> November was impressive.

They occupied the campus for four days, and it was the occupation in the Chinese University which was the biggest. This was because many students from other universities came to help, and made the resistance to police attack on the night of 12<sup>th</sup> possible.

However the lack of organization and coordinating bodies within the occupation magnified the differences over tactics between those CUHK students and those from outside campus. The former was angry over some outside students' destroying facilities and reckless behavior. Eventually the management of the university closed the whole campus down and the occupation was ended.

As for the strike, this was the third strike call but this was not that successful either.

It is true that many people could not get to work on that day, not because they took the initiative to strike but because the students, through occupying campuses, located by 30 main roads or railways, practically paralyzed half of Hong Kong's busiest area. But these are actions which common folks with a job cannot join or are not ready to join.

The successful general strike on 5<sup>th</sup> August was memorable but already by 2<sup>nd</sup> September a second strike call failed to take off as most people feared retaliation from Beijing. The latter has already showed its claws after the 5<sup>th</sup> August strike by making Cathy Pacific's management fire its employees' union and more than 30 employees.

As both the students and the unions could find no way to protect strikers from dismissal, it should not surprise us that the other two strikes were not very successful.

- Increasingly there is now a danger of the narrowing of the mass base of radical actions. Meanwhile the number of people who come out to march despite the ban has also declined. The movement is in a bottle neck. It cannot effectively escalate further in face of severe government repression.

- On the other hand, there are also signs that the support for the five demands of the movement is broadening as well. This is a result of the government's hardline policy and police brutality. Whenever there are clashes the police chase after protestors into the community and fire tear gas. This practice deeply antagonizes those who at first remained neutral or even supportive of the government's policy.

One positive result of this movement is that from September onwards community protests have become very common, something that has not been seen before.

There are young activists who realize the importance of labor struggle and now call for joining or forming new unions. A young public servant's call to form a new public employee union has resulted in very good response. News reported that hundreds of public servants have enlisted.

This is also a response to the traditional unions which have been slow in reacting in such a period of turmoil, although credit is due to them for their support for the 5<sup>th</sup> August strike. Without this strike it would not have been possible to prove to Hong Kongers the relevance of labor and to attract a new generation of labor supporters.

Local elections are scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> November. Certain people from liberal parties have appealed to the movement to stay away from strong civil disobedience so that it will not give the government an excuse to cancel the election - something that pro-Beijing parties have been pushing for, fearing that with the movement's five demands being highly popular (with more than 60-70 percent support) the former may suffer a catastrophic defeat.

There is a grain of truth in the liberals' argument, but this must be re-assessed within a context of an understanding of one thing:

- local councils in Hong Kong are merely consultative bodies which do not have the power to impose any tax or to administer any local government departments.
- If the election is relevant it is more because it may act as an expression of an angry public.

Very soon the movement will be put to a big test again, either by going to the election or by being banned from doing so if the government eventually cancels the election.

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