

# Millions march in Hong Kong against extradition law

By Ben McGrath  
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Two million Hong Kong protesters, nearly one-third the city's population, protested Sunday to demand the complete withdrawal of the proposed extradition bill and the resignation of the city's top official, Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

Demonstrators filled the Hong Kong downtown areas of Central, Wan Chai, Causeway Bay, and Admiralty where the government complex is located, chanting "Withdraw" and "Resign." Many of the protesters were youth and students, including those in high school. The protest size doubled the number of participants on the previous Sunday, with two of every seven people in the city taking part.

The mass protests in Hong Kong are another indication of the resurgence of working class struggles internationally. While the official protest leadership is determined to limit the demands, there is undoubtedly widespread underlying discontent over the vast social disparities in the city between the ultra-rich elite that dictates policy and broad layers of the population who are struggling to make ends meet.

Lam had announced on Saturday at a press conference that the bill would be postponed, though the government still plans to pass it in the future. Lam hoped this would be enough to dissipate public anger, saying, "This is time to restore as quickly as possible calmness in society."

The opposite has been the case. Lam's decision only further fueled public anger as the bill, which would allow extraditions to mainland China, has not been completely withdrawn. Protesters denounced Lam for ignoring the broad public hostility to the bill and are deeply concerned that, if made law, Beijing would use it to arrest political activists and opponents of the Stalinist regime.

Savana Ho, a 25-year-old student, protesting against

the government, expressed the anger felt by many, saying, "Hong Kong people are running out of ways and ideas to save their city. The government is forcing citizens to just make any effort we can."

Another demonstrator, surname Wong, denounced the police violence that occurred during the march on Wednesday. She stated the protest was "much bigger today. There are many more people. I came today because of what happened on Wednesday, with the police violence."

On Wednesday, police used tear gas, water cannon, and rubber bullets against tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators as they protested outside the Legislative Council. Lam then denounced the protesters as "rioters."

Opposition to the extradition bill did not begin on June 9. Since the legislation was introduced in February, public discontent has been growing. This was evident on June 4 during the annual vigil in Hong Kong to mark the anniversary of Tiananmen Square massacre, drawing a record number 180,000 people for the event. Many of the attendees demonstrated against the extradition bill.

The Stalinist regime in Beijing knows that it cannot allow a center of political opposition to exist, especially so close to major industrial regions like Shenzhen, where working-class anger is growing. At the same time, it fears that the mass protests in Hong Kong will spread to the mainland.

Han Zheng, the central government's chief on Hong Kong and one of the seven members of the Chinese Communist Party's top Politburo Standing Committee, met with Lam Friday night. The next day, she announced the decision to postpone the bill. A spokesperson for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of China's State Council stated, "We support,

respect and understand the decision (to postpone the bill).”

The official opposition in Hong Kong, a grouping known as the pan-democrats, is seeking to exploit the protests for their own gain. Claudia Mo, from the right-wing chauvinist Hong Kong First party has postured as a radical opponent of Lam and the extradition bill. She said Sunday, “My resentment has been pent-up. The suspension is just a postponement. The plan is just being delayed. It’s not the matter of what, it’s a matter of when. So I am coming out.”

The bill’s postponement is meant to give Lam or a future chief executive time to work out a deal with the pan-democrats behind the scenes.

Lam held out a hand to the pan-democrats at her Saturday press conference, stating that the government had suspended the bill so as to “restart our communication with all sectors of society, do more explanation work and listen to different views of society. I want to stress that the government is adopting an open mind to heed comprehensively different views in society towards the bill.”

Like the pro-Beijing Lam administration, the pan-democrats are fearful that the mass protests over the extradition bill could become the focus for wider discontent among workers over deteriorating living conditions and social inequality.

Twenty percent of the Hong Kong population, or 1.37 million people, lives in poverty and faces a severe housing crisis. The median cost of a home is 18 times the median household income. By the government’s count, over 200,000 people live in illegal and dangerous subdivided apartments, barely large enough to fit one person where safety and hygiene standards are ignored. Hundreds of thousands more live in makeshift shacks on the top of apartment buildings or factories.

“In Hong Kong, residence rights, one of the fundamental human rights, are being ignored and we want you to know the serious reality,” Gordon Chick Kui-wai said last year. He is in charge of housing assistance at a non-governmental group Hong Kong Society for Community Organization.

Hong Kong workers have some of the longest working hours in the world. The Census and Statistics Department released data in April that showed 1 in 5 people works 55 hours a week on average. Those most

impacted by long hours worked in food service industries, security, land transportation, construction, and retail. Yet between 2008 and 2018, workers saw only a 0.7 percent annual increase in wages, taking inflation into account.

In 2003, half a million people marched in Hong Kong to oppose a National Security Bill that would have effectively extended China’s police state measures to the city. The bill was shelved indefinitely and, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa was forced to step down in early 2005.

As in 2005, Beijing is seeking to defuse the huge protests to the extradition bill, so as to prevent it from triggering mass opposition among working people on the Chinese mainland. At the same time, it remains determined to silence critics and opponents on its doorstep in Hong Kong that can likewise fuel anti-government sentiment within China.

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