

Two-day strike begins in Hong Kong following weekend of protests

By Ben McGrath
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Protests in Hong Kong continued for the 13th consecutive weekend ahead of a planned two-day general strike beginning today. Fearful of the intervention of the working class, authorities are stepping up their repression. Clashes took place on Saturday and Sunday between demonstrators and police, who used tear gas, pepper spray, water cannon and rubber bullets and also fired live rounds as warning shots.

The strike called for today and tomorrow has been backed by workers from at least 21 sectors, including those in construction, aviation, retail, and tourism. Protest rallies have been organized at Salisbury Garden in Kowloon and at Tamar Park in Admiralty for Monday. Another is planned for Tuesday at Chater Garden in Central.

Students from more than 90 universities will take part in a class boycott as courses throughout the city are set to resume following the summer break. They have planned a sit-in protest Monday afternoon at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

It is unclear how many workers will take part in the strike, but an anonymous student organizer told Channel News Asia that the two days of strikes and boycotts was a “leaderless campaign.” While the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) has lent limited support, it is not calling out its nearly 200,000-strong membership.

Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong’s largest airline, has threatened its employees with termination should they participate in the strike. “We expect all of our employees to report for work as normal and over this period and will be monitoring attendance levels closely. Any breach of policy or regulatory requirements will be investigated and may lead to termination of contract,” the airline stated.

Protesters have regularly rallied at the airport in recent weeks, which is the largest cargo shipping hub in the world and one of the largest for passenger travel. Any shutdown of the airport would have a significant impact on the economic life of the city. A general strike in early August by tens of thousands of workers canceled more than 200 flights.

On Sunday, demonstrators blocked rail and car traffic leading to the airport terminal, causing the cancellation of more than two dozen flights. They forced the airport express train to stop service, blocking tracks while others gathered at bus terminals to blockade the highway leading from the city to the airport. Transportation service began to resume around 10.30 p.m.

As in the past, demonstrators at the airport emphasized that they were appealing for support from foreign travelers. “We plan to disrupt activity at the airport to draw attention to what the government and the police are doing to us,” an anonymous 20-year-old protester told the media on Sunday. “If we disrupt the airport more foreigners will read the news about Hong Kong.”

Demonstrations also took place on Saturday, despite a ban on a scheduled march. The day began peacefully, but participants were met with police water cannons and tear gas, leading to clashes throughout the day. Saturday also marked the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Umbrella Movement in 2014, a 79-day protest calling for the direct election of Hong Kong’s chief executive without candidates first being approved by a Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-anointed committee.

Beijing has been pressuring companies to crackdown on workers taking part in protests, an indication of growing fears over the emergence of the working class

in open struggle against not only the Hong Kong government of Chief Executive Carrie Lam, but potentially the capitalist system itself. Such a struggle could spread to the Chinese mainland where workers face similar forms of exploitation and oppression.

The strike movement, however, lacks political leadership and is limited at present to demanding that the Hong Kong government address the demands of the protests: to withdraw legislation that would allow extradition to the Chinese mainland, for Lam to resign, for an independent investigation of police violence and the withdrawal of all charges against protesters.

These limited democratic demands will not be met unless the movement of workers and youth in Hong Kong links up with the working class in China on the basis of a socialist perspective directed against the CCP regime and the profit system it defends. The danger is that the narrow parochial character of the official demands will enable Beijing to isolate the movement and prepare for military-style repression.

Beijing has repeatedly made clear that it will tolerate the protests and strikes indefinitely which are disrupting one of its major financial and economic hubs and threatening to trigger opposition on the mainland.

In an attempt to intimidate protesters, the military released another video last week of soldiers and riot police on the city's border in Shenzhen taking part Thursday in "anti-riot" drills. The *People's Daily* newspaper compared demonstrators to ants and stated that the military could intervene to put down the protests. Military officials recorded Saturday's protests from the roof of their building near the government complex in Hong Kong.

The only defense against a violent and bloody military crackdown is the mobilization of the working class, independent of all bourgeois parties and tendencies. Workers and youth must reject all forms of Hong Kong parochialism and chauvinism and unite with the mainland Chinese working class in a common struggle against capitalism.

The CCP, its name notwithstanding, has presided over decades of capitalist exploitation at the expense of the working class since it initiated the processes of capitalist restoration in 1978. It defends the same economic system that has enriched a small layer of Hong Kong elites, a system which is also defended by all sections of the city's ruling elites including those

represented by the official opposition—the so-called pan-democrat grouping in the Legislative Council.

This fight is an international one as workers come into conflict with the bourgeoisie around the globe. Autoworkers in the US recently voted overwhelming to take strike action, opposing both the auto companies and the corrupt United Auto Workers union. Hong Kong workers and youth should reach out to their class brothers and sisters in the US, as well as workers in the "yellow vest" movement in France, and those engaged in struggles elsewhere around the world.

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