

Hong Kong protesters: Turn to the Chinese working class, not US imperialism

9 September 2019

Yesterday's march by thousands of Hong Kong protesters to the American consulate, to appeal to President Trump and the US Congress to intervene, is a turn in a dangerous political direction that threatens to isolate and derail the protracted protests for basic democratic rights.

In the absence of a political perspective oriented to the working class in China, Asia and internationally, right-wing, pro-capitalist individuals, groups and parties are aiming to divert the protest movement into the arms of the enemies of democratic rights.

US imperialism has a long record of exploiting and fomenting protest movements, not to defend democratic rights, but to further its own predatory economic and strategic interests. It has repeatedly used the banner of "human rights" in efforts to install pro-US puppet regimes and as the pretext for its illegal, neo-colonial invasions in the Middle East, the Balkans, Afghanistan and North Africa.

The march to the US consulate, complete with the waving of American flags, comes as the Trump administration is intensifying its trade war and military build-up throughout Asia against China. The appeals to Congress to pass legislation penalising China over democratic rights in Hong Kong take place as moves are underway to brand Chinese Americans, as well as Chinese students and academics in the US, as stooges of Beijing and take away their democratic rights.

Any turn to Washington plays directly into the hands of Beijing which through its state-owned media seeks to malign the protests in Hong Kong as the work of radical agitators and the "black hand" of the US. Various commentators, taking their cue from Beijing, have summarily dismissed the movement as a made-in-the-USA colour revolution, but have nothing to offer the millions in Hong Kong protesting the heavy, anti-democratic hand of Beijing and its lackeys

in the territory.

The protests were sparked by legitimate concerns over democratic rights, in the first instance over legislation that would allow critics and opponents of Beijing to be extradited to the Chinese mainland on trumped-up charges. While that bill was suspended, the movement continued to swell, fed by anger over police brutality, but also by broader fears that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime is intent on ultimately imposing its police-state regime on Hong Kong.

Underlying this sustained protest movement lies deeper concerns about the worsening economic and social crisis in what is one of the most expensive cities in the world, dominated by small cliques of billionaires while the majority of the population wrestle with the lack of affordable housing, high prices, low wages and falling job opportunities. The protests that swelled into the millions have clearly involved substantial sections of the working class, which also made themselves felt through general strike action August 5 and then on Monday and Tuesday of last week.

It is no accident that in the wake of last week's two-day strike conscious efforts are being made now to divert these protests in a rightward direction towards US imperialism. The official opposition grouping known as the pan-democrats, and those trade unions and groups that follow its lead, represent layers of the Hong Kong capitalist class who are opposed to Beijing's encroachment, but are deeply fearful of any eruption of the working class.

Workers and youth wanting to fight for democratic rights should oppose the turn to US imperialism, but to do so an independent political perspective is sorely needed. Marching to the US consulate can only alienate the real political ally of the protest movement in Hong Kong—that is, the Chinese working class. Chinese workers confront the same attacks on democratic and

social rights by the CCP regime in Beijing, but are overwhelmingly hostile to the US which is mounting a trade war and threatening all-out war against China.

The protests in Hong Kong are part of the resurgence of the working class internationally that has already manifested in the “yellow vest” movement in France, opposition protests in Puerto Rico, growing strike movements in the US and Europe, and social upheavals in Africa. In opposition to the turn to the US and Trump, workers and students in Hong Kong should orient to this developing international movement of the working class, especially in the United States.

The only basis for unifying the working class is in a joint struggle against capitalism and for socialist internationalism. To do so, it is essential to oppose all forms of nationalism and chauvinism—in particular both the reactionary Chinese patriotism promoted by Beijing and the equally reactionary Hong Kong “localism” that scapegoats Chinese mainlanders for the deteriorating social conditions created by capitalism. Groups and parties advocating an “independent” capitalist Hong Kong in one way or another seek to subordinate it to imperialism.

The fight for socialism requires the political clarification of the key strategic experiences of the 20th century, particularly of the treacherous role of Stalinism and its Chinese variant, Maoism. The 1949 Chinese revolution was a momentous event that ended the long-domination of imperialism over China, unified the fragmented country and lifted living standards. But from the outset it was stunted and distorted by the CCP regime, which claimed to speak in the name of working class and the masses but over which workers and peasants had absolutely no say.

Based on the nationalist Stalinist perspective of “Socialism in One Country,” Mao and the CPP led China into an economic and strategic blind alley. Just 23 years after the revolution, Mao made his peace with US imperialism setting the framework for capitalist restoration from 1978, which rapidly accelerated after the brutal suppression of workers and students in the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. China has experienced staggering levels of economic growth over the past 30 years at the expense of equally staggering levels of social inequality, hardship and distress.

The International Committee of the Fourth International—the world Trotskyist movement—is the

only party that has waged a consistent struggle against Stalinism, its apologists and all forms of opportunism in the working class. It is the lessons of this decades-long political fight that form the essential political capital required to lead the emerging class struggles whether it is in Hong Kong and China, or elsewhere around the world. We urge students and workers to contact us to open up a dialogue on these crucial political issues as the step toward the necessary establishment of a section of the ICFI in China.

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