Defend the Hong Kong Democracy Movement!

written by Solidarity National Committee | July 3, 2020

Protesters vs. police in Hong Kong in May. (Photo: Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times)

In an act of retribution to the Hong Kong movement beginning last year, which has seen prolonged street clashes between the police and protestors, China has decided to unilaterally impose new national security laws to Hong Kong.

These laws severely circumvent the city's existing autonomy, mandating the establishment of Beijing-appointed security bureaus and more police to clamp down on individuals suspected of breaching 'national security' — defined very broadly and up to Beijing's authority. The laws even threaten to target Hong Kong permanent residents living outside of Hong Kong.

The details of these laws were scant to Hongkongers until after the bill was officially passed on Tuesday, including to Hong Kong's highest officials: even the Chief Executive and Secretary of Justice have no say in the process to shape the bill.

Many legal experts and activists have noted that these laws effectively spell the end of the "One Country, Two Systems" as the city knows it. These laws reflect Beijing's eagerness to prioritize authoritarian state control at the expense of its constituencies' right to determine their own political future. It is no coincidence that devotees of Nazi statecraft, like Jiang Shigong, have been increasingly appointed to influential positions in Beijing's policymaking structures for Hong Kong.

International socialists must stand with the people of Hong Kong's struggle against Beijing's state repression. The movement is extremely diverse, containing a number of different ideological elements, including pro-U.S. and left-wing factions. We condemn the Chinese government's efforts to stoke up nationalist divisions to neutralize Hong Kong's attempts at building links of solidarity with people in the Mainland and beyond. We also strongly oppose the xenophobia some in the movement exhibit toward Mainland Chinese people.

Hong Kong's movement is not one of national independence — a position that remains a minority in the movement — though undoubtedly one for self-determination, trying to stake its own voice in the inter-imperial rivalry between the U.S. and China.

This new Cold War dynamic between Washington and Beijing covers up the real division of power in today's world: between the capitalist state elites and the international working-class. China's miraculous economic growth in the past decades has depended on super-exploiting its own working-class, and perpetuating the extraction of resources from the global South to provide low-cost commodities to the global North.

Beijing's accusation of Hong Kong protestors being backed by "foreign interference" is also hypocritical. It falsely generalizes the movement's association with U.S. regime-change outfits like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), while pro-Beijing groups have long had their own NED connections. The regime is more than happy to court U.S. surveillance and riot control technology firms — many of the same ones used to assist the murder of Black people and protestors against police brutality in the United States today — to assist its repressive campaigns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

U.S. political elites' response has been ineffectual and self-serving: the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act offered no substantial support for the movement, while insidiously implicating the movement in support of the U.S.'s inhuman sanctions on Iran and North Korea. On the other hand, the "Protect Hong Kong Act," which would have prevented some U.S. firms from supplying teargas and other weaponry to the Hong Kong Police Force, has been stalled in the Senate.

In addition, the Trump administration has shown that even the smallest gestural support for dissidents in Hong Kong, the Mainland, and Xinjiang takes a backseat to the interests of economic elites in the volatile U.S.-China trade relationship. With the interdependence of the U.S. and Chinese markets, Hong Kong would only be trapped in a vicious geopolitical bond; finding a third way is the city's own chance of liberation.

We condemn the U.S. political establishment from intervening in Hong Kong's affairs for its own imperial designs. But we also recognize that links between the United States and a small minority of protestors do not delegitimate an entire mass movement's fight against one of the most exploitative governments today. As Lenin writes, *"the fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilized by another 'Great' Power in its equally imperialist interests should have no more weight in inducing Social Democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination than the numerous case of the bourgeoisie utilizing republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial robbery."*

As the Hong Kong people enter an even darker phase of the struggle with these security laws, we call for other socialists to continue forging lines of support from below to support and empower the progressive elements of the movement.

One immediate obstacle for solidarity comes directly from elements from the Western left, those who have spread disinformation to whitewash the Chinese government's crimes in the name of "anti-imperialism." These efforts are especially shocking in the midst of a global movement against policing, just as China continues to quietly learn from and adopt U.S. counter-insurgency and policing methods. The left must vigilantly combat these narratives to truly build an effective mass movement against all imperialisms.

Lastly, we invite unions, community organizations, and other mass movement organizations to show Hongkongers that there are practical alternatives to lobbying the U.S. government for support. Just as anti-democratic governments from the U.S. to China continue to work in tandem to suppress people's voices and rights for capitalist profit, mass movements must reach beyond national borders toward building a democratic, revolutionary and socialist future.

Originally posted here.