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Hong Kong protests continue amid Beijing's veiled threats of military intervention

Demonstrations sparked by a Beijing-backed extradition bill are continuing in Hong Kong following the third mass protest in recent weeks on July 1. Approximately 8,000 people gathered Friday evening at Chater Garden in the city's Central district. Another march is planned for Sunday that could again draw hundreds of thousands as social discontent mounts.

Friday's demonstration was the second organized by the group known as "Hong Kong mothers." Participants held signs denouncing police violence and demanding the complete withdrawal of the extradition bill that would allow those accused of crimes to be sent to the Chinese mainland, including political dissidents. The Hong Kong government has only suspended the bill indefinitely. Other signs expressed solidarity with young people facing uncertain futures amid a worsening global economic slump.

Student groups the same day rejected talks with Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who offered to sit down with them behind closed doors, in a maneuver likely meant to co-opt or intimidate the youth. Pang Ka-ho, one of the student leaders at the University of Hong Kong, said yesterday, "If the government could have had a sincere dialogue with young people before things deteriorated, it wouldn't have come to this."

Sunday's march is scheduled to conclude at the West Kowloon Railway Station, where the high-speed train arrives from the mainland. Protesters also originally planned to march through a section of the city frequented by mainland tourists, but the police blocked it. A supporter of the protests stated online, "I don't know how many mainland tourists will see

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our messages, but if the central government knows that we have shifted our focus to promoting Hong Kong values to mainland people, the Communist Party will be scared.”

Reaching out to mainland Chinese is an important step in the struggle for democratic rights. It is impossible for Hong Kong to exist as an isolated city. Governments and companies around the world are tearing up democratic rights to extract ever-greater profits from the working class and in a desperate attempt to prevent the explosion of mass unrest over social inequality. All sections of Hong Kong’s bourgeoisie support the attack on living standards, including the opposition pan-democrats.

The fight therefore is explicitly an international one, which means a fight for socialism against capitalism and the nation-state system. This is the political perspective that must be taken to the Chinese working class. Vague references to “Hong Kong values” only mask the political issues involved and divides the working class.

The necessity for a unified struggle is underscored by the danger that Beijing will send the military against the protesters. The Chinese garrison in Hong Kong conducted joint ground, aerial, and naval drills on June 26. The army’s newspaper *PLA Daily* reported that the exercises were conducted “with the goal of examining the troops’ combat capabilities in terms of emergency response and joint operations.”

The report on the drills was not published until July 2, however, the day after half a million people marched through the city. A group of protesters broke into Hong Kong’s Legislative Council where they smashed windows, painted anti-Chinese graffiti on the walls, and clashed with riot police.

An anonymous source in Beijing told the *South China Morning Post*, “The garrison holds such exercises regularly but the newspaper chose to publish details of these activities [on Tuesday] because it wants to tell the outside world that this is a sovereignty issue for China.” Beijing has blamed the protests on “foreign interference” and could use this as the pretext for deploying the army to put down the protests should Hong Kong authorities be unable to do so.

In another veiled threat, Zhu Yonghua, a naval commander who took part in the exercises, told the Chinese Communist Party’s organ, *People’s Daily*, that the drills were designed to “help the Hong Kong government protect the lives and property of its citizens.”

Foreign powers are certainly seeking to use the protests as a means for applying pressure to Beijing. Great Britain’s foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt warned Beijing Thursday that his government would not “just gulp and move on” and threatened possible sanctions.

Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong, wrote a comment for the *Financial Times* yesterday, arguing, as did Hunt, that Britain has “obligations to Hong Kong,” painting a picture of Britain as a benevolent former ruler only concerned with the people’s democratic rights.

British imperialism, however, seized the city following the end of the First Opium War in 1842, used it as a base for the bloody suppression of the Chinese peasantry and working class. British colonial rule is directly responsible for the lack of democratic rights and gross social inequality that exist in Hong Kong today.

On Monday, US National Security Advisor John Bolton similarly stated that Washington expects “China like every other country to adhere to its international obligations.”

Neither Britain nor the US has any genuine concern for democratic rights in China or elsewhere. These are the same two governments currently engaged in a campaign to extradite journalist Julian Assange to the US for exposing war crimes in a deliberate move to intimidate other journalists from exposing other government crimes.

Washington and London are intent on ensuring Hong Kong remains a major hub for finance capital and are worried that the city’s proposed extradition law could be used to target their own business interests. Any intervention by the US will be to further its military buildup in the Asia-Pacific and war drive against China.

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