



Official Chinese Press Delivers Warning to Hong Kong Protesters

Chinese officials have used the editorial pages of the *People's Daily*, the flagship paper of China's Communist Party, to warn protesters engaged in anti-Mainland China demonstrations to back off. The ranks of demonstrators have been swelled by thousands of University of Hong Kong students who have been boycotting classes to take part in the protests seeking expanded voting rights, less interference from Beijing, and the preservation of freedom of the press, which exists to a greater degree in Hong Kong than on the mainland.



The recent protests began after it was announced that all candidates running for the position of chief executive — a position currently held by the Beijing-supported Leung Chun-ying — would be selected by a committee made up largely of pro-Beijing puppets.

The *People's Daily* said in an October 1 article that while speaking at the National Day reception, Leung said the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has reached a decision on the process for selection of the Chief Executive (CE) by universal suffrage, and promised that the CE can be elected through "one person, one vote" from 2017 onward.

"It is understandable that different people may have different ideas about a desirable reform package. But it is definitely better to have universal suffrage than not. It is definitely better to have the CE elected by five million eligible voters than by 1,200 people," the official Communist paper quoted Leung as saying.

The *Washington Post* reported that on October 1 protesters threatened to block more government buildings to emphasize their dissatisfaction. In response, Chinese authorities branded the demonstrations as being illegal and issued a vague warning that, if they continue, the "consequences will be unimaginable."

In a report for *The New American* on September 29, Foreign Correspondent Alex Newman noted that over last weekend, when the demonstrators refused to disperse, riot police used tear gas, beatings with batons, and other harsh measures to break up the demonstrations. More than 40 people were injured, including some police officers.

However, the Beijing-supported crackdown implemented by its Hong Kong subordinates apparently backfired. Newman reported:

By Monday, even more protesters, enraged by the show of force, poured into the streets in response to the violence. Analysts and witnesses on the ground said the official attacks on college students and other young demonstrators led to greater numbers of older Hong Kongers joining the



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rallies as well.

In response to the protest, the Chinese government's Hong Kong liaison office said in a statement released on September 28: "We believe the majority of Hong Kong residents will not tolerate a few people's radical, illegal activism at the cost of Hong Kong's rule of law, stability and prosperity."

The protests have attracted enough attention back in Beijing that the *People's Daily* has run several articles commenting on them. One editorial on September 30 expressed concern that the "activists are jeopardizing the global image of Hong Kong, and presenting the world with the turbulent face of the city."

The People's Republic of China, the world's largest communist oligarchy, with the Communist Party elite ruling over 1.3 billion people, is apparently much more image-conscious than the hardcore regime in charge back in the "bad old days."

People's Daily proudly boasts that "Hong Kong is a financial and fashion hub of the world," a fairly "bourgeois" statement from a party organ that supposedly represents the anti-capitalist philosophy of Marx!

After noting that "Radical opposition forces in Hong Kong should be blamed" for the unrest that is sullyng Hong Kong's image, the paper laments,

US media is linking the Occupy Central movement with the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. By hyping such a groundless comparison, they attempt to mislead and stir up Hong Kong society.

China is no longer the same nation it was 25 years ago. We have accumulated experience and drawn lessons from others, which help strengthen our judgment when faced with social disorder.

The Tiananmen incident refers to the brutal suppression of demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989. While official figures of the number of protesters killed range from 200 to 300, Amnesty International's estimates puts the number of deaths at several hundred to close to 1,000. That image is not what China's government wants to perpetuate, however, now that China recorded a trade surplus of \$49.83 billion in August of 2014.

An article in the *Economist* on September 30 explored Hong Kong's importance to China's economy and how its value as an economic engine might affect China's response to the protests. It noted:

Hong Kong has proved to be more reliable than the mainland as a source of equity financing. Since 2012, Chinese companies have raised \$43 billion in initial public offerings in the Hong Kong market, versus just \$25 billion on mainland exchanges, according to Dealogic. More than anywhere else in the world, Hong Kong has also provided Chinese companies with access to global capital markets for bond and loan financing. What's more, Hong Kong is the key hub for investment in and out of China. It accounted for two-thirds of foreign direct investment into China last year, up from 30% in 2005.

The author concluded: "If China were to do anything that jeopardised their special relationship, Hong Kong would suffer most; but China would also pay a heavy price."

So far, the protests in Hong Kong have been little more than a public relations problem for Beijing, which does not want to upset the mutually beneficial and unique relationship between the mainland and the former British colony. China grants Hong Kong a little freedom, and receives an economic cash cow in return. But if Beijing fears that the protests in Hong Kong will inspire more of the same on the mainland, it might decide that the price of continuing the "One Country" and "Two Systems" status quo



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is too high a price to pay and might order its chief executive there to start cracking down on the protesters more forcefully.

Photo of students protesting in Hong Kong: AP Images

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