

Beijing-anointed candidate challenged in Hong Kong

Monday 2 April 2007, by [CHENG Eva](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2007).

To no-one's surprise, the Beijing-anointed incumbent Donald Tsang was returned in Hong Kong's March 25 "election" for the territory's chief executive — the third such election since the territory's reversion to Chinese rule in 1997. What was surprising was that the rival candidate, lawyer Alan Leong — billed as representing the politically moderate middle-class democratic camp and the first ever challenger in this highly managed ballot — secured a respectable 123 votes compared to Tsang's 649.

Only about 800 selected elites — members of the so-called Election Committee — were qualified to vote despite popular campaigning since 1997 for universal suffrage. Hong Kong's popular movement aimed to achieve a popular vote for this position as well as the territory's legislature by 2007 and 2008 respectively. Beijing has continued to resist these demands even though Hong Kong's Basic Law, the territory's post-1997 de facto constitution, promises direct election of the chief executive without committing to a time frame.

The popular movement staged a protest march through the city on March 18 attracting around 5000 people, a big drop from similar demonstrations in recent years. (Last year's July 1 demonstration to mark the ninth year of the return to Chinese rule, for example, attracted 580,000 participants.)

A petition demanding a popular vote for the chief executive and the legislature was signed by more than 50,000 people. On March 25, while the elite vote was taking place in a remote and heavily guarded location near the international airport, a simulated "people's vote" was organised by pro-democracy groups in 54 downtown locations. More than 8200 citizens cast votes and 5129 (64%) supported Leong, compared to 2553 (32%) who backed Tsang. Some 92% of the participants voted for direct elections to be held no later than 2012, when the current chief executive term ends.

Outside the official voting venue, a cavalcade of 20 protest vehicles and dozens of protesters also tried to get their message across. These actions were led by at least two of those qualified to vote inside. As two of the 30 popularly elected members of Hong Kong's 60-seat legislature, Emily Lau and maverick activist "Long Hair" Leung Kwok-hung automatically got a vote. However they spent time chanting protest slogans outside the venue instead.

The most radical of the various pro-democracy protest groups present was the League of Social Democrats (LSD), of which Leung is an executive member. Some LSD members tried to storm their way into the venue but were forcibly removed by police.

Leung did go in eventually, not to vote but to make his message heard inside as well. An experienced radical and master of protest stunts, Leung put on a yellow gown (symbolising an anointed Chinese emperor) over a skeleton suit, complete with a pig face mask. When Tsang's "victory" was announced, Leung chanted loudly to denounce the farcical nature of the "vote", before being taken away by security. Most of the 25 pro-democracy legislators who were inside the venue also chanted

in protest at the fake election.

Of the 16 votes considered invalid, 11 were blank and two carried statements denouncing the “small-clique” election. Before the voting date, Leung campaigned among the limited voters to cast a blank ballot to protest. In response, Hong Kong’s casino tycoon Stanley Ho Hung-sun, also a member of China’s People’s Political Consultative Conference — an “advisory” body filled with Beijing’s stooges — warned that there was a way to find out who cast a blank vote. The ballot was supposed to be secret, so Ho’s indiscreet threat has attracted public outrage.

On March 26, commander of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison Wang Jitang and Political Commissar Zhang Rucheng sent a letter to Tsang, congratulating him for his “overwhelming victory”.

P.S.

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