

# Genuine elections: Hong Kong's Umbrella Upheaval

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AS *AGAINST THE Current* goes to press, the confrontation between the Hong Kong democracy movement and the Beijing-backed authorities remains unresolved.

The government's various attempts to end the occupation — to wait the students out, to rout them with pepper spray and clubs, to unleash criminal gangs in the guise of "angry citizens" — have failed. Protesters remain determined. Negotiations are scheduled for October 21, but whether they'll actually occur or produce any positive outcome is uncertain.

The struggle demanding genuine elections for Hong Kong's chief executive, beginning with a September 22 student boycott of college and university classes and a September 24 sit-in in front of government buildings, "by the night of Monday September 29 morphed into an unprecedented occupation of four major districts in Hong Kong involving at least 80,000 people, predominantly students." [1]

It soon expanded beyond the initial plans of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, moving to an open-ended occupation of major commercial squares and arteries. It has been joined by substantial sectors of the city's population.

The occupiers' demands, including the resignation of the Beijing-appointed chief executive C.Y. Leung, are fuelled both by the Chinese regime's drive to extend its authoritarian and repressive practices into the semi-autonomous territory, and by the growing inequalities that make life increasingly difficult for non-affluent students and working people (sound familiar?).

By October 4, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions put out a statement condemning the government's support to thugs for their attacks — including sexual assaults — on protesters and demanded implementation of genuine universal suffrage.

As Sean Starrs explains: "(B)y far the largest act of civil disobedience in Hong Kong history comes at a very awkward time for the Chinese Communist Party, which at least partly explains the unprecedented and swift but spectacularly failed attempt by the Hong Kong Police to violently repress the students and prevent their momentum from growing. With President Xi Jinping's 'anti-corruption campaign' so far targeting only his rival factions, the CCP is currently in the midst of the one of the most serious tests to its unity in decades...

"(T)he CCP announced that class struggle was officially over in China, and therefore removed the right to strike from the constitution in 1982. Yet, since especially the Nanhai Honda strike in 2010, there have been hundreds if not thousands of increasingly daring strikes across China, the largest of which was earlier this year when 40,000 workers at a Dongguan shoe factory went on strike, less than 100km north of Hong Kong. And certainly after 1989, it is clear that the tenets of freedom of assembly and speech do not jive well with this CCP hegemonic project, yet are very dear to the hearts of many Hong Kongers...

“The central government in Beijing will likely do much in its now considerable imbalance of power to prevent any demonstration effect in Hong Kong that might spread to the Mainland. And there is certainly the basis for an Occupy Shenzhen and others across China, as many grievances range from high labour exploitation to severe air pollution, from food safety scandals to rural and urban land seizures, from widespread corruption to increasing violent crime and one of the highest inequality rates in the world.”

Bai Ruixue, editor of *China Labor Net*, [2] reported on discussions taking place at various protest sites: Is it was really possible to sustain the protests for 30 or 60 days? What should be achieved achieved before protesters withdraw? How is it possible to be tactically flexible in negotiations, but maintain the goal of universal suffrage? Can this goal be won before protesters leave, or is this a war to be won in stages? Some noted that without winning concessions, the government will only attack more ferociously next time.

While this struggle is shaped by specific local conditions, Starrs observes that “it must be placed in the broader context of occupations and popular uprisings the world over that have been inspired by the Arab Spring, especially the occupation of Tahrir Square in early 2011 [which] inspired the occupation of the State Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin and the indignados of Madrid, Spain — both of which inspired Occupy Wall Street in September 2011 and the subsequent blossoming of Occupies around the world.”

As an October 21 *New York Times* online article reported, Beijing-appointed leader of Hong Kong, Leung Chun-ying, says “allowing his successors to be chosen in open elections based on who won the greatest number of votes was unacceptable in part because it risked giving poorer residents a dominant voice in politics.”

## Against the Current

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\* « Hong Kong’s Umbrella Upheaval ». Against the Current (#173), November-December 2014.  
<http://www.solidarity-us.org/>

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## Footnotes

[1] See, available on ESSF (article 33459), [September 22, 2014: Students Unfurl the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong](#).

[2] See on ESSF (article 33235), [Hong Kong Update: the future of the protest movement discussed in Mong Kok \(a report\)](#).