

Protecting the June Fourth Memory, from 1989 to now

Tuesday 4 June 2019, by [HKCTU](#) (Date first published: 3 June 2019).

Contents

- [Union of Hong Kong Post \(...\)](#)
- [Shame on Hong Kong Federation](#)
- [From Cabin Crew to Chairperson](#)
- [Keeping the memories of \(...\)](#)

Three decades ago, a widespread democracy movement took place in Beijing. People in Mainland, Hong Kong and overseas, all held their breath while witnessing the development of the movement. They hoped that this movement would finally bring some changes to the corrupted dictatorship of China. When the shooting broke out on June 4, 1989, their hope was devastated, but the tears and bloodshed on the Tiananmen Square have never vanished from their memories. Until now, people in Hong Kong still mourn for the victims. In this issue, we interviewed Hong Kong workers who supported this democratic movement, to understand the causes of their participation, the memories they have treasured and the meaning of this democratic movement to them.

Union of Hong Kong Post Office Employees: A Continuous Participation in Different Form

Photo <http://en.hkctu.org.hk/sites/default/files/images/china/000.jpg>

Union of Hong Kong Post Office Employees (UPOE) is a union of government employees. Such a union tends to be more conservative when it comes to political issues. To our surprise, our interviewee, Mr Yung Sing-kwong, the then vice-organizing director of the UPOE told us a story about how the union cared about the democratic movement from the beginning.

“Since the beginning of the movement, under the leadership of our then chairman Michael Siu, the union was quite progressive. Influenced by Lau Chin-shek and Lee Cheuk-yan and given the Sino-British Joint Declaration had been signed for only five years, Hongkongers were very concerned about their future after the Handover, as well as the political climate in Mainland China. Under this context, UPOE cared a lot about the development of the movement. Our deputy director of the welfare department, even went to Beijing, to support the students and workers there.”

“After the June 4th Massacre, UPOE supported the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China’s (hereafter: Hong Kong Alliance) call to “workers and student strikes”. Though Mr Szeto Wah later called off the strike, our union organized our workers to strike for half day, to pay respect to the victims and to bring flowers to Xinhua Agency, as to show our support to the movement. Since then, UPOE has become a member of the Hong Kong Alliance.”

As the Handover approached, some members started to worry about the union’s membership of the

Hong Kong Alliance and its potential negative impact. As in 1995, Hongkongers were rather worried about the political environment after the Handover and the potential retaliation they might face. Though UPOE kept communicating with its members to ease their worries, the members still opted for leaving the Hong Kong Alliance. When Mr Yung recalled this, he showed a sense of nostalgia. Some of the UPOE leaders decided to keep supporting Hong Kong Alliance in their personal capacity. Mr Yung himself volunteered as a marshal at the Candlelight Vigil, organized by the Hong Kong Alliance.

Shame on Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, from condemning the massacre to defending the murderous regime

Photo http://en.hkctu.org.hk/sites/default/files/images/china/43819559541_bf30b09efb_z.jpg

Mr. Cheng Ching-fat, currently the secretary of Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General Union, used to be an active member of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (hereafter: FTU). He participated in union development work and as the democracy movement broke out, he followed its course with other members attentively.

"Our members have been following and discussing since the students protested at the funeral of Hu Yaobang. We agreed that China's economic reform also brought many social problems along." Mr Cheng recalled. "When June 4th Massacre happened, our reaction and the FTU's reaction were alike. We were angry and puzzled, we thought the government could have handled it better." On June 6, 1989, FTU published a statement in the newspaper to condemn the government's brutality against protesters.

"Then it changed in August or September 1989. The upper level of FTU claimed that our interpretation was not correct. Many members and I were surprised. By September 1989, Tam Yiu-Chung went to Beijing. Upon his return, he hosted a meeting in our welfare centre and claimed that the public misunderstood the movement. He claimed it was related to the vitality of the state. It made us suspect, if FTU was again switching back to nationalism."

Deeply annoyed, Mr Cheng issued a statement to condemn the FTU, with the help of another experienced labour activist. He was interviewed by Singtao Daily and formally withdrew from FTU. He had joined the FTU with high idealism and felt deeply disappointed by its shift to nationalism. Later, Mr Cheng joined the independent union movement and later became the chairperson and president of HKCTU.

Apart from his union work, Mr Cheng also joined activities related to Chinese workers' rights. He believes that he might not live to see the redress of June 4 Incident, but as Hongkongers still have room to voice out, they should not only voice out for June 4 victims, but also for other human rights concerns in China. It is a moral responsibility of Hongkongers, to fight for justice for underprivileged. Therefore, he attends the June 4 march and candle light vigil every year, to show that he would never forget the less privileged groups in China.

From Cabin Crew to Chairperson, Carol Ng Paid her Respect in Beijing

Photo <http://en.hkctu.org.hk/sites/default/files/images/china/□□□.jpg>

As the chairperson of HKCTU now, Carol Ng was a ground staff of Cathay Pacific in 1989 and joined the “black armband” action to mourn the victims.

“I was new in Cathay Pacific. My other colleagues started to follow the democratic movement in May, when it first started. Back then, we had a room equipped with a television in Regal Hotel. We would go in to watch news between our shifts. When the Beijing Government announced martial law, we almost felt the tension in Beijing. When we saw from the live news that the troops reached Beijing and started to shoot, some colleagues became very emotional.”

Ms Ng recalls.

The next day, one or two supervisors who cared about the movement, put a bag of pins and black clothes next to the television. They recommended us to put on the black armbands, as to mourn the victims. This action lasted for a while, after two weeks I still saw many colleagues carrying the black armbands.”

She said at that time, she thought the Chinese Government’s action was unacceptable, and there must be better ways to handle the movement. But she was not familiar with Chinese politics back then. Later she worked for British Airways and had the opportunity to work in Beijing and knew the people better. She went to the places where the June 4 Massacre took place, to pay respect and “reenact” those scenes in her mind. *“Once I asked a familiar shopkeeper, if he had talked about June 4 or other issues related to the government. He was so nervous and asked me to keep quiet. I could feel the people’s constraints.”*

From her time in British Airways to becoming the chairperson of HKCTU, she has now more insights when she reviews this history, *“the independent labour activists in China face all kinds of oppression. Now, Hong Kong Government as a henchmen of Beijing, is tightening its control and making trade union movement more difficult.”* she analyzes.

– Keeping the memories of June 4 and the democratic spirit alive

In Hong Kong, since the Umbrella Movement in 2014, young people feel defeated and powerless. To get over this depression, Carol thinks the spirit of the democratic movement could guide us.

“After 30 years, the regime is still trying to evade its responsibility. It means the Communist Government is afraid of taking responsibility, afraid of the changes it might imply. The democratic movement in China has not recovered since the blow in 1989, but there are always people in China and in Hong Kong insisting to fight for justice. They serve as role models. The Umbrella Movement happened only 4, 5 years ago and we still have a long way to go. We should keep going and never forget our courses, just like those who are still fighting for justice for the June 4 victims. Only through persistence, we could walk out of this low tide, and make structural changes in the society.” she added.

P.S.

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