

The Anti-Occupy Central Campaign Sells Out Hong Kong

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When the Occupy Central civil disobedience movement was initiated in Hong Kong early last year the initiative attracted major attention in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The movement struck a raw nerve in Beijing because it pertains directly to the territory's democratic system in 2017 and its future political development. After the three Occupy Central activists Rev. Chu Yiu-ming, Benny Tai Yiu-tung and Chan Kin-man formally announced the launch of the movement, China resorted to overwhelming suppression, mainly targeting the media.

From mid last year, a few media publishers received threats and the hosts of several radio and TV programs were replaced. Kevin Lau, chief editor of the Ming Pao daily newspaper, was first sacked from his post and then severely injured in a knife attack. Before the Occupy Central rally on July 1, the popular pro-democracy news website House News was closed down. This continued pressure produced the desired effect, isolating Next Media Limited, Hong Kong's biggest media group, as the only anti-Beijing voice.

The June 22 unofficial referendum on democratic reforms that would allow the public to nominate candidates for the city's chief executive attracted almost 800,000 votes and nearly one million Hong Kong residents took to the streets in support of the reforms. Nevertheless, backed by pro-Beijing organizations and media, the

Hong Kong government countered the poll with a signature drive and an anti-Occupy Central rally. The root of the problem is the controversy over whether China will allow Hong Kong citizens to nominate candidates for chief executive without preconditions.

When Hong Kong's Basic Law was drafted, Beijing, eager to win over the British rulers and the Hong Kong people, agreed that it states "the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights... as applied to Hong Kong shall remain in force and shall be implemented..." At the time, Beijing also agreed that the U.N. Human Rights Committee would monitor Hong Kong's implementation of the covenant (ICCPR). Following a periodic review in March last year, the committee reminded the Hong Kong government that equal and universal suffrage in the territory must comply with the ICCPR.

Advocates of the Occupy Central movement have all along insisted that mechanisms for universal suffrage must meet international standards. The commitments set forth in the ICCPR are their most important basis of argument. Under the proposal put forth by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, a candidate for chief executive must be approved by a majority of the Nominating Committee. This restriction severely compromises most Hong Kong citizens' right to stand for election. When the right to stand for

election is trampled on, the so-called “universal suffrage” can only be a fake.

Beijing responded to the criticism by denying international standards and insisting that universal suffrage comply with the Basic Law. For the pro-democracy activists this is unacceptable. They have threatened to boycott the second round of public consultation on constitutional reform.

Last year, the U.N. warned the Hong Kong government against pushing fake universal suffrage and urged it to come up with a proposal for a genuine election within a year. However it looks like that Beijing will stick to the old playbook and wield its influence to ward off any interference in Hong Kong affairs by any “external force.”

In fact, Chris Patten, the last British governor before the handover to China, had adamantly demanded that the British government support Hong Kong’s struggle for full democracy. Nevertheless, Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office welcomed the Chinese proposals as “confirmation that China’s objective is for the election of Hong Kong’s Chief Executive through universal suffrage.” Of course, London’s conciliatory statement is connected to the fact that a high-profile delegation brought huge business opportunities to Britain a few months ago. The British government now faces suspicion that it kowtows to money and sells out the Hong Kong people at this crucial time.

By controlling Hong Kong’s political development, China wants to ensure its continued

total dominance of Hong Kong, which began with the signing of Closer Economic Partnership Agreement in 2003. Similarly, while Taiwan has not been formally annexed by China, Beijing has already begun the de facto Anschluss of Taiwan under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Day after day Beijing alters Taiwan’s status quo, draws tycoons on its side and infiltrates Taiwan on all fronts. Using financial instruments Beijing is tapping Taiwanese capital to steal assets and technologies from the Taiwanese people. If the Taiwanese turn a blind eye to all these developments, I am afraid when we want to turn back the clock it will be already too late. **BT**

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