

STUDENTS FIGHT THE DOMINATION OF BEIJING AND THE HONG KONG OLIGARCHY

An interclassist mass movement lacking any class dynamic

More than a month of agitation, confrontations and discussions all over Hong Kong, one of the metropolis of global capitalism and one of the most important centres of the world's second biggest economy - this was an event of major importance for the world proletariat as well as, without any doubt, the ruling classes of the planet. The revolt saw the direct and active participation of tens of thousands of proletarians, waged or not. By their collective mobilisation, university and then secondary school students played a decisive role in the movement.

The civil disobedience group OCLP (Occupy Central with Love and Peace), which fights for democracy in Hong Kong, wanted to mobilise 10,000 people on 1 October, a public holiday. The aim was to occupy Chater Road, in the business and administration district of Central, for three days. Benny Tai Yiu-ting, a professor of law and one of the founders of the organisation, gave an interview to Bloomberg on 2 September where he said that the date had been chosen "so as to cause minimum damage to the economy of Hong Kong". OCLP had negotiated with the authorities for the occupation to take place around a public garden between 1 and 3 October.

The success of a movement launched by a student union and joined by secondary school students overturned this plan. On 22 September the HKFS (Hong Kong Federation of Students) called for a boycott of courses in twenty of Hong Kong's campuses¹, which was carried out by around 30,000 students. Two days later, a secondary school student organisation, *Scholarism*, joined the movement. On 26 September, student organisations evicted from Tamar Park to make way for a pro-Beijing demonstration, decided to occupy an area close to the seat of government. Two student leaders and Wong, the figurehead of *Scholarism*, were arrested which only fanned the flames of the movement and spread it to other sections of the population.

Faced with the scale of the movement, the leaders of OCLP, who were in contact with the student union, declared that their movement of civil disobedience had started. Meanwhile, the occupation hadn't taken place in Central, as intended, but in Admiralty. What's more, as was admitted by one of the co-organisers of *Occupy*, Chan Kin-man, a large part of the participants in the movement didn't want to be led by OCLP and left their original sites. Many of them set out for the places that would become the other centres of the occupation, Causeway Bay and Mong Kok. *Occupy* activists went as far as handing back their badges.

On 28 September, thousands of protesters, mostly students, tried to occupy various places: on Hong Kong Island, it was the administrative buildings of Central and Admiralty, while in the business district of Causeway Bay and Kow Loon it was two commercial areas, Tsim Sha Tsui and Mong Kok. The repression caused dozens of injuries, and there were close to a hundred arrests, but it was pretty mild if we compare it to what happens in Europe, and even more so by the standards of Asian countries. Nevertheless, the use of riot cops, who charged, gassed and beat people, scandalised large sections of the Hong Kong population.

Tens of thousands of people went out to join the college and school students. Young workers of all categories, older people, men and women, labourers, office workers, workers in finance and high-tech industries, the liberal professions, housewives, pensioners, artisans... joined the movement as well, often with the blessing of their bosses (who nevertheless didn't go so far as to pay them for the days spent occupying). The class composition of this movement was therefore rather heterogeneous.

In terms of organisations, we can see:

- The HKFS, founded in May 1958 to defend democracy, has 58,000 members in eight universities. It is opposed to the Beijing regime and participated in demonstrations in support of Tiananmen
- OCPL, created by the university law professor, Benny Tai Yiu-ting, the Reverend Chu-Yiu-ming and Chan Kin-man (professor of sociology) in January 2013, calls for universal suffrage and civil disobedience.

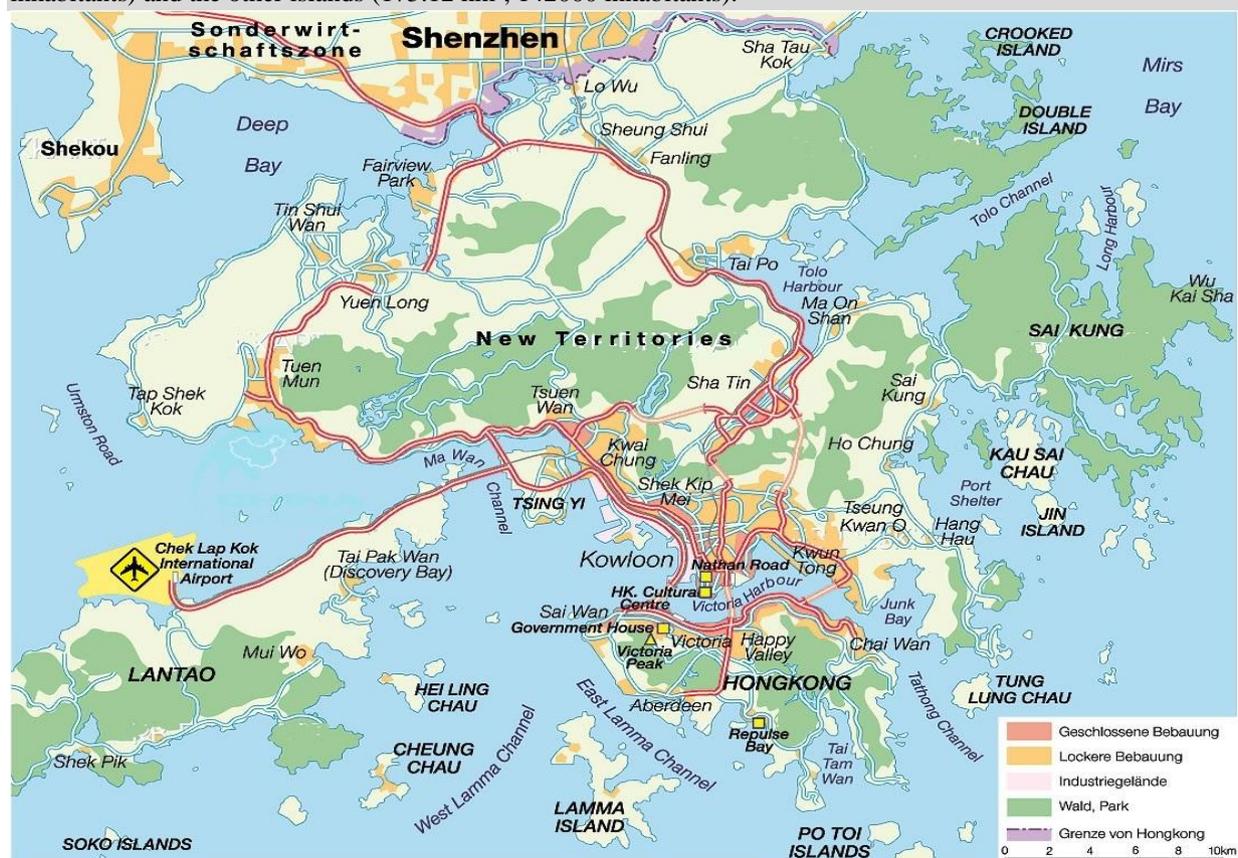
¹ Eight universities, 15 campuses and 115,000 students for state sector. Eight universities, 14 campuses and 87,000 students for private sector.

- *Scholarism*, a group founded by secondary school students in May 2011, considers itself as a pressure group against “Moral and National Education”². In September 2012 it participated in the occupation of the ministry of national education.

But there is also *Civic Passion*, a smaller movement but whose popularity is growing, created by Wong Yeung-tat at the beginning of 2012. This militant aggregation of the extreme right fights for the separation of Hong Kong from mainland China and defends the “natives” against the “mainland invasion”. While this last organisation has certainly gained members through its more determined and offensive policy towards the ruling oligarchy, at no time has *Civic Passion* succeeded in threatening the position of the democratic leaders of OCLP and the HKFS. Throughout its course the movement never really escaped the control of these two political forces.

Hong Kong's geography

The special administrative zone of Hong Kong (1079.25 km², 6.77 million inhabitants – in 2013-, is divided into four geographical zones: Hong Kong Island (the cradle of the city, 79.38 km², 1.26 million inhabitants), Kowloon (46.93 km²) and the New Territories (on the mainland, 777.52 km², 3.54 million inhabitants) and the other islands (175.12 km², 142000 inhabitants).



The movement's ideology also contained Christian elements. Christian symbols, crosses, portraits of Jesus, were very obvious on the barricades, where impromptu religious rituals were held. Christians are over-represented amongst the organisers of the movement. Wong is an evangelical, Benny Tai is also a Christian, Chu Yiu-ming is a Baptist priest. They are also present in the opposing camp, in particular the Anglicans, whose archbishop, Paul Kwong, has strongly criticised the protesters. Although some churches have opened their doors to the protesters, most haven't. Carrie Lam, number 2 of executive, and Donald Tsang, previous responsible of executive, are Catholics. Half the population say they have no religion (around 3.6 million, out of 7.2m). The Catholic Church was established in Hong Kong in 1841 and, as with the Protestants, was free to operate and grow. Today there are 480,000 Protestants and 360,000 Catholics. For the rest the division is: Buddhists, 1.5 million; Taoists, 1 million; Muslims, 220,000; Hindus, 40,000; Sikhs, 10,000. After having feared diminution of religious

² Moral and National Education (MNE) was intended to be a new form of moral instruction to be introduced in primary schools in 2012 and secondary schools in 2013. The previous Moral and Civic Education had only taught vague moral values like “respect for others”, but the new MNE would openly support the Chinese one-party system. Not surprisingly, there has been widespread opposition to it from both students and parents and, at the time of writing, its introduction has been delayed.

freedom; along with their privileges, a great part of Christin hierarchy chose to collaborate with the Communist party that didn't harass it.

Blockades and reactions to them

Underneath its non-violent appearance, the movement of young, and older, people has stood up to the police, pushing through and running round the police lines and resisting police charges. Apparently without any orders from the OCLP collective, young people, notably young workers, decided to extend the occupation movement to two other commercially important areas: Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island in Tsim Sha Tsui, and above all to Mong Kok in Kowloon. The first barricades were set up in Mong Kok on the night of 28 September. The aim of opening this new front was to make the police disperse their forces and thus to help the protesters of Central and Admiralty. It's in Mong Kok that the most violent confrontations took place between occupants and the police, but also with "anti-occupation" groups.

On 1 October, China's National Day and a public holiday, the movement reached its highest level: more than 100,000 participants in a demonstration more than three kilometres long. The number reduced later to a few thousand, then to a few hundred. There were only a few dozen participants that night in the four sites of occupation.

The fundamental error in the conduct of the movement was the ultimatum sent to Chun-Ying Leung, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, calling on him to resign no later than midnight on Thursday 2 October. It's an error, because if your adversary doesn't submit, but on the contrary goes on the offensive, and you're not ready to go on the offensive even quicker, then the vanity of such a command will only demoralise the movement. Only a few thousand protesters were ready to go all out. In the hours and days that followed, the forces of repression supported by the foot-soldiers of organised crime organised charges to sweep away the protesters. The most determined militants of the movement hung on to the barricades and tried to resist the assaults, sometimes combined, of the forces of the police and the "anti-occupiers". The strong arm men of the Triads, taxi drivers and truckers were the shock troops for dismantling the barricades, with or without the help of the police.

Facing the "anti-occupation" attacks and attempts by the police to remove the blockades, there were only 2,000 to 3,000 people. Chased away from some roadblocks, the protesters soon built new ones, convinced that blocking traffic in the city was their main bargaining chip for getting at least partial satisfaction of their demands. Not being able to resist charges of hundreds of well-equipped riot-cops, the protesters knew how to use their mobility, sometimes succeeding in outflanking the cops so as to reorganise themselves in other places.

Each time the repression hardened the number of protesters grew, particularly after the Hong Kong Executive broke off negotiations with the HKFS. The authorities had to rely on the exhaustion of the protesters to progressively dismantle the barricades. There was a public discussion, shown on TV, between the student leaders and government representatives. The protesters, rightly, expected nothing from it. The only result is that government representatives promised to report to Beijing that there really was a problem in Hong Kong.

Despite blunders, the police operation stands out from the tradition of brutality of the regime in China. The repressive action was progressive and controlled: there was no question of repeating Tiananmen. The authorities understood the limits of the movement perfectly. They believed themselves able to absorb it without too much damage by a clever mixture of offers of discussions with the organisations which led it and a low-intensity repression. It seems to have worked.

In the camp of the capitalists, when the most important ones weren't openly supporting the Beijing government they were strongly opposed to a political agitation which they thought might harm their portfolios. So Li Ka-shing, the richest man in Asia, invited the students to go home, even though (of course!) he understood their point of view.

A tradition of political demonstrations and, to a lesser extent, strikes

Each year there are demonstrations gathering tens to hundreds of thousands of people against the control of Beijing over the politics of Hong Kong.

Here's a brief summary of the movements which have affected Hong Kong over the last 25 years.

1989: demonstrations in support of the Tiananmen Square movement involved up to 1.5 million people, a third of the population of Hong Kong.

The "First of July" demonstrations or New Year demos have continued down the years.

2003: 350,000 to 700,000, according to various estimates, protested against Article 23 (the anti-subversion law), the economic situation *and* the management of the SARS epidemic. The demonstrations lead to the withdrawal of Article 23 in September.

2004: demonstrations of around 200,000 call for the direct election of the Chief Executive.

2009: important demonstrations mark the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square movement.

2013: 1 January, a demonstration of more than 100,000 against C.Y. Leung.

2013: a 40-day strike by the dockers in the port of Hong Kong, led by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and supported by the Hong Kong Federation of Students. The strike was semi-victorious, with a wage rise of 9.8% rather than the 20% that the strikers wanted. In contrast to mainland China, independent unions can legally exist and are often led by pro-democracy militants, sometimes having a history going back to Tiananmen or before.

2013: early October, up to 450 of the 1,400 workers at the Swire Coca-Cola factory go on strike. After two days, the strike ended and the management agreed to discuss working conditions with the union and promised to reduce working hours.

2014: big demonstrations for the 25th anniversary of Tiananmen.

2014: 1 July, between 100,000 and 500,000 protest for free elections in 2017.

We should note that many of these movements have caused the government to back down in some ways, even though the demonstrations, while massive, have taken place most of the time away from the financial and administrative districts and have had little effect on Hong Kong's economy

A very limited workers' mobilisation but with widespread solidarity

On 28 September, the brewers, teachers and dockers federations of the HKCTU³ launched a strike call with four demands: *release arrested protesters; stop suppressing peaceful assembly; withdraw "fake universal suffrage" and replace it with a fair electoral system; Leung Chun Ying must resign*

Consequently, around 200 delivery drivers from the Swire Coca-Cola factory (out of a staff of 1,400) stopped work for two days, 28 and 29 September (on this day only 40 remain on strike), and around a hundred others refused to work overtime over the same period. In total, according to the International Trade Union Confederation, 10,000 workers were on strike on 29 September.

Even though representatives of the leadership of the building workers union, belonging to the pro-Beijing federation (HKFTU), turned up in front of the protesters to demand that they remove the barricades, the next day a dozen workers from that sector went to show their solidarity with the movement. They made themselves useful by giving courses on how to make barricades. In the same way, while two civil service unions (always part of the pro-Beijing HKFTU) openly denounced the movement, thousands of state employees declared themselves in solidarity with the struggle using a petition on Facebook. Many civil servants went to work wearing a yellow ribbon, a symbol of the movement.

At the start, the occupiers simply used metal barriers as barricades, lashed together somehow. The technique was progressively improved, through destruction, reconstruction and the aid given by various workers, such as the builders, who used their science of constructing scaffolding from bamboo, which is light but very strong. A young participant in the occupations, who had been active in Mong Kok and Admiralty, noted: *"I find that the culture of the two sites are very different. The people in Mong Kok come from different backgrounds; the subjects brought up are more social"*

In Admiralty, a site more controlled by the organisers, *"the climate is more artistic and studenty"*. The occupation of Mong Kok, in a neighbourhood of boutiques and big shops, had been decided and above all carried out against the advice of the recognised organisations of the movement. Those who participated repeated that they did not obey the orders of the OCLP. It is here that the protesters, often workers of all ages, formulated economic critiques around work, wages and the housing question. But these were never concretised into organised collective demands. They said that they didn't need to be led, either by the student Federation or by other groups. *"We don't need representation. It's a mass movement"*, one of them said, accusing the organisers of being too ready to make concessions.

In Mong Kok, the occupiers had to fight against taxi drivers, truck drivers and masked men, clearly the hired muscle of the Triads. A few times the cops even kept the two sides apart, and the consequences of the fights were limited, with neither deaths nor serious injuries. In the end, the few hundred (not all present all the time – many went to work and came back) defenders of the barricades of Mong Kok and Admiralty, exhausted, were dislodged by the police, who hacked through the barricades with chainsaws. In contrast, Admiralty was a more calm and tranquil place of counter-culture, with artistic activities (painting, music, dance and origami) which attracted numerous tourists. An umbrella dance reminded one journalist of a scene from *Mary Poppins*.

Rare and weak responses on Mainland China

At Jinan University in Guangzhou there are 5,000 students from Hong Kong (out of 35,000 all together). Some of them spoke about the difficulty in explaining the situation to other students. On the other side, almost 10,000 students from mainland China were studying in Hong Kong. Although only a small minority joined in the movement, even fewer supported the central government. The majority were frightened of a more severe

³ The *Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions* was founded in July 1990, groups 61 affiliate unions and has around 170,000 members. It is independent of the government, contrary to the HKFTU, *Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions*, which is loyal to Beijing and was founded in April 1948. This has 62 affiliate unions and around 341,000 members. The origins of the HKCTU go back to the associations of Christian workers which started in 1966. The HKCTU also participated in the foundation of the Hong Kong Labour Party in December 2011.

repression. However, by distributing information the mainland students helped break the silence about the movement. The Chinese media had to denounce the movement and could no longer ignore it.

There were only symbolic demonstrations in the big cities of China, involving no more than a few dozen people. These demonstrations were soon repressed. In Macao, an authorised solidarity demonstration gathered 800 people, and a small group even went to Hong Kong.

An interesting example was Wukan, an agglomeration of 15,000 inhabitants, in the neighbouring province of Guangdong. In 2011, violent confrontations between the population and the police ended up in a negotiated compromise at the highest level of the region. The corrupt leaders of the district were fired and the leaders of the revolt were able to stand in the local elections, and were elected. The elected rebels had since been arrested for “corruption” and the old officials returned to office. A few days after the start of the occupations in Hong Kong, a few dozen people sat around the local administration buildings with umbrellas. They explained that they followed the movement with interest and were in solidarity with the rebels of Hong Kong.

What radicalisation?

Here and there, as the repression grew, some sections of the protesters expressed dissent towards the confident leadership of the HKFS and OCLP, and this dissent expressed itself in action. In particular, these radicalised sectors contested the pacifism and excessive passivity of the street occupations.

Following the breakdown of negotiations to establish dialogue with the authorities in Hong Kong, the student Federation and *Scholarism* addressed themselves directly to the president of China. Denouncing the local power which interpreted the policies of the centre badly, the organisations said that the movement was in no way one of the “*colour revolutions*” – that is to say one of those movements, mostly in Eastern Europe, which have overthrown governments – but just a fight for “*authentic democracy*”. And this democracy wouldn’t call into question the principle of “*one country, two systems*” put in place after 1997. This statement summarises the position of the three organisations which wanted to lead the movement. It also justified attempts to remove the barricades, against the wishes of those who held them, so as to stop disturbing the flow of traffic.

In the face of police violence, Wong, the young leader of *Scholarism*, told the protesters not to direct their anger against the forces of order, not to insult them or take it out on them. In the same way, when confrontations spread after the authorities suspended the planned meeting with the student leaders, the leaders condemned the violence of the police, but *also* the protesters. When injunctions were taken out against the occupiers, the leaders of the organisations said that continuing the occupation was an individual decision and that minors should no longer be involved in the movement.

On the level of content, there were slogans of support for Tibetans and Uighurs during the ascendant phase of the movement but they quickly disappeared from the demonstrations along with those commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen revolt, as the agitation contracted and the Executive went on the offensive.

In the same way, poor immigrants from Asia⁴ employed in work which was the least skilled, with the worst conditions and the worst pay, with conditions close to slavery for some of them (domestic staff for the Hong Kong rich), were pushed out of the movement by small but active elements like *Civic Passion*.

In addition, Filipino nationals, mostly women employed as “maids”, were given a stern warning by their Consulate to stay away from the protest, almost as soon as it started. In warnings which went far further than anything coming from the HK police, they were told that they could be imprisoned for up to 12 months for participating in public disorder! The tactic seems to have worked, with Filipinos being scared off the streets⁵.

Although problems linked to employment and housing were often raised by the protesters, no fraction of the movement formulated demands other than the initial one for “real” or “authentic democracy”. The demands of the movement came down to the call for resignation of the Chief Executive, and above all for the election of political leaders to be based on universal suffrage without the candidates being preselected by the central state

Hong Kong, led by the party of local businessmen, still plays an important economic role for China

The rapid growth of the mainland Chinese economy has reduced the share of Hong Kong in the combined GDP of the two systems from 16% in 1997 to 3% today. Similarly, the share of Hong Kong in exports has fallen from 51% to 17%. However, the city has always been the port of entry of foreign capital, human as well as financial. The flotation of big Chinese companies in Hong Kong has made them improve their governance and it’s through the Hong Kong Stock Exchange that China has taken over the London Metals Exchange, the most important in the world. The internationalisation of the yuan also relies on Hong Kong.

⁴ Their origins are (2006 figures): Philippines 120,000, Indonesia 90,000, India 20,000, Nepal 16,000, Thailand 12,000, Pakistan 12,000. That’s around 270,000, compared to 70,000 “rich” immigrants (Europe, Japan etc.), and 800,000 Chinese from the “interior”.

⁵ *South China Morning Post*, 1 Oct 2014.

The big Hong Kong capitalists, whether they're the ones who've been there since early British colonial times, like Jardine Matheson – the Keswick family empire, which made its fortune 150 years ago in the trade in opium and other goods –, or whether they are newcomers like Li Ka-shing, have found an accommodation with the leadership of the Party in Beijing.

Many of them have made their fortune in property – five groups run 70% of the market in residential property –, profiting from the lack of habitable surface area. Others profit from concessions granted by the government in telecommunications, the port or transport. Two groups have a dominant position in distribution.

These big capitalists are well known to the protesters, who blocked the headquarters of Li Ka-shing's empire, who forced a third of the shops belonging to the Cheg Yu-tung family to close, and who forced the residents of the grandest hotel belonging to Jardine, the Mandarin Oriental, to walk 400m to their cars because the road was blocked.

Interviewed by journalists from the international economic press, Chun-Ying Leung clearly explained that universal suffrage might give power to the poorest people who make up most of the population. While meeting the student leaders, Rimsky Yuen, the Secretary of Justice, took the example of the minimum wage, worrying that the level might be fixed by an assembly representing the majority. All categories have to be represented. It's in this way, he might have said, that the authorities govern in harmony with the big capitalists of Hong Kong.

In 1958, the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou-En-Lai, let his British opposite number, Macmillan, know about a possible decision to make Hong Kong "a self-governing territory like Singapore". This position was shared by the local capitalists with political power.

A movement which goes beyond some of the weaknesses of the other *Occupies* without fundamentally detaching itself from them

The movement in Hong Kong is different from the movements of the *Occupy* type elsewhere which, while criticising the inaction and corruption of central and local governments, put forward economic demands around lack of jobs, low wages, the high cost of living and ever-rising rents. Under the ashes of the democratic rebellion, the best advised representatives of the ruling class have detected the social question, reduced to the problem of inequalities of income. Often, the school and university students interviewed by the media have mentioned their anger with the high cost of living, high rent, the difficulty of finding decent jobs, etc. A situation shared with a lot of other strongholds of capitalism. But, in total, the demands of the movement come down to the demand for the resignation of the Chief Executive, C.Y. Leung, and the holding of elections based on universal suffrage without the candidates being preselected by the Chinese Communist Party.

Although minority among students as among students and secondary school than among population, paradoxically, though, by stopping the circulation of commodities, the Hong Kong movement had economic consequences for some sectors such as distribution and transport, a much greater impact than those of the other *Occupies*, including the strongest like, for example, in Syntagma (Athens), Puerta del Sol (Spain), Oakland (US), Tel-Aviv (Israel) or even Tahrir Square (Egypt)

Other aspects of the Hong Kong democracy movement went beyond the weaknesses of the other *Occupies*.

First of all, there is, as we emphasised in the first paragraphs of this text, its massive dimension. Some 100,000 people braved the ban on demonstrating to call for the resignation of the local Executive in a country where open repression is the rule, representing a qualitative jump in itself.

Then, there is its endurance. One month of hard agitation, regularly attacked by the cops and by informal gangs of reactionaries and criminal businessmen have shown how determined the Hong Kong rebels are. It's a determination which has been maturing for a long time and which has begun to express itself systematically since the city was put under Chinese control.

Finally, the appearance of a collective dynamic which can't be reduced to and which did not appear with the occupations. The university and school students, the spearhead of the protests, have acted together and their organisation preceded and made possible the occupation movement. Contrary to some forms of wishful thinking, the multitude is not constituted into an antagonistic social corps by the *Occupy* movement. It's exactly the opposite which happened. Previously organised segments of the school and university students were capable of offering tens of thousands of isolated proletarians a means of collective expression.

The last positive factor, the movement occupied and partially blocked the activities of one of the planet's most advanced and densely populated productive territories. A concrete productive territory where plenty of Asia's cathedrals of finance and a good number of headquarters of multinationals are concentrated (Admiralty)

Hong Kong: a look at the social situation

Hong Kong is in advance of what could be and already is the situation in the most advanced countries of the capitalist system where competition with the new strong countries of Asia has created a tendency for revenue to fall.

It was already one of the most unequal areas of the world in terms of incomes in 1997. Since then the gap between the richest capitalists (Li Ka-shing, involved in property, energy and controlling the port, has seen his fortune jump from 12.4 to 31.4 billion dollars) and the more or less skilled workers grew significantly. Hong Kong is more unequal than the US, the UK, or even Singapore, according to its Gini coefficient, which has gone from 0.43 in 1971 to 0.518 in 1996. The rise has slowed but continued, reaching 0.537 in 2011.

The average household rent is around \$US 3,000 per month and 20% of the population live below the poverty line. More than 30% of inhabitants live in social housing. The government admits that the lack of construction of new housing with affordable rent is the main problem. With rents being unaffordable, a huge number of inhabitants are living in overcrowded accommodation. While wages stagnate there is almost full employment, with unemployment scarcely higher than 3%. At the same time, according to Forbes, 45 Hong Kong billionaires have a combined fortune of \$214 billion.

Numerous students have talked about the difficulty of finding a job in line with their qualifications. Even if the occupation movement doesn't put forward explicit economic demands, for many people protesting is the means of expressing frustration and discontent. According to official statistics, the wages of newly qualified graduates have only increased by 1% per year over the course of the last 17 years, far behind the rise in prices and even more behind rents. Many students are forced to live with their parents indefinitely. Some of the more skilled jobs have gone to mainland China, and skilled workers have come to Hong Kong from China and elsewhere, in particular in the financial sector, increasing competition.

The situation is even more difficult for the workers in the more casual sectors. In hotels and restaurants, nominal wages have only risen by 17% since 1998, which means an absolute fall in the standard of living. In education, numerous advantages, like aid for sending children abroad to study, have disappeared and wages have not kept up with inflation.

Employment by sector (2012)

Industry	105,308
Construction	70,578
Import/export, trade, ,wholesale	554,628
Retail	260,246
Transport, storage, postal & courier services	167,241
Accommodation and food services	274,195
Information and communications	97,230
Insurance and finance	207,700
Property	125,938
Professional & business Services	337,408
Social and personal services	454,210
TOTAL	2,654,682

Source: *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics, 2013 edition*, "Summary of key statistics section"

But these positive points are not enough to outweigh the limits that the movement had right from its beginning.

The first of these was the absence of an explicit social content. A movement for political democracy without a social soul, the one for universal suffrage in Hong Kong hardly created the conditions to attract broad sections of the proletariat hit by the degradation of living and working conditions. Thousands of proletarians remained spectators or, at best, in solidarity with a movement which they had never seen as their own.

Secondly, the citizen's protest didn't seize the unprecedented chance to take over a productive territory so central to capital. Incapable of putting forward an offensive strategy based on blocking the economy, the basis of all state power, the democratic movement also prevented itself from putting down roots in the place where it had started and where it had to withdraw to when its intensity and scale declined, the universities and secondary schools. No university or secondary school was occupied.

Thirdly, the participants in the occupations rapidly abandoned the universities and high schools. These were, though, the only productive territories⁶ where they were rooted. Universities and secondary schools above all served as a base for meeting other protesters. University and school students were the only two groups to have a collective activity. The workers who participated in the movement went there individually. From the start this weakness limited the formation of a collective body capable of beginning to elaborate a critique going beyond opposing the institutions and the Executive of Hong Kong. The few calls for the freeing of China's political prisoners, the attempts to call into question the colonial domination of China over Hong Kong and the other border regions, the messages of solidarity towards the Uighurs in Xinjiang and the Tibetans, don't change things fundamentally. This absence of collective reflection also allowed an extreme-right group *Civic Passion* to present itself as the most determined enemy of the central power in Beijing.

The movement for universal suffrage in Hong Kong never went beyond the framework of bourgeois political democracy. On the contrary, in one sense, it reinforced it in a radical form by a mass collective action. But the social forces which catalysed it got a taste of power, despite the defeat experienced. The dynamic which started out has, here and there, allowed people to begin a practical critique of the established order and to sketch out the first features of a different order, based on the collectivity and the struggle. Together seizing the freedom

⁶ We define productive territories in relation to the social production/reproduction of capital, which may or may not involve the direct production of value. Universities, secondary schools etc., are places of reproduction of social labour power, families are essentially concerned with the reproduction of individual concrete labour power (even if families help the socialisation of individuals in work and by work). In school (when it's working well), you learn to develop your individual faculties of labour, integrating them into socialised, collective labour. Places for forming social labour power are therefore areas for the reproduction of social capital even if in themselves they don't directly produce value.

to blockade the city, interrupting its activity, taking over productive territories, have marked people's consciousness, despite the bourgeois democratic ideological cage of the movement. Attempts by active minorities to free themselves from the pacifism professed by the OCLP and HKFS testify to this beginning of political autonomisation. These active minorities were not exempt from the extremist temptation to pick an unwinnable fight, notably on the night of the nonsense ultimatum hurled at the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, called on to resign no later than midnight on Thursday 2 October. In case of refusal, the student leaders of the movement had promised to occupy the buildings of the local executive, a promise which hit a wall of repression and the immaturity of a movement which wasn't ready for militarisation and confrontation.

MC/KPK, le 11 November 2014

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