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China

# Solidarity with the mass movement for democracy in China

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### **FI supporters in the Chinese diaspora outline the significance of the ongoing protest movement in China and their stance to it in this statement approved by the Bureau.**

A fire in a residential building in Ürümchi, which killed a number of predominantly Uyghur victims, catalyzed the largest mass movement in China in decades. The fire was a result of China's faulty pandemic lockdown regime, which has long deprived many across the country of basic freedom of movement and other human rights, and even access to basic necessities. These draconian policies are not new. Many local protests have emerged against how the lockdowns have been conducted in the last two years. Most notably, Foxconn workers in Zhengzhou have been suffering from forced labor conditions as a result of the factory employing a closed-loop system that traps the workers in the worksite to maintain production—a move approved by the Chinese state council. The workers staged a protest that became an important prelude to the mass protests, where they were met by police repression siding with Foxconn's corporate interests.

The years since the Tiananmen protests and the subsequent massacre in 1989 have seen a lull in mass movement consciousness as China accelerates its turn to neoliberalism. While local and wildcat actions have been widespread, there has been little success in building a cross-sector, independent mass movement across civil society. Repression accelerated with Xi Jinping's rise to power, further deepening China's authoritarian mode of governance. The possibility of mass struggle has been further restricted by divisions among between Han Chinese and other ethnic groups, often stoked by the regime. We believe that these protests signal an important shift in the political consciousness of the people of China to overcome these entrenched limitations.

The protests in China should not be reduced to the anti-masking and anti-vaccine protests by right-wing groups in the West. People in China are discontented with the way in which pandemic control had been executed. At various times during the pandemic, masses of people were locked against their will into large fangcang-style hospitals that often exacerbated infections. Many were trapped in their residential buildings for days and weeks, sometimes without access to basic necessities.

The massive struggle across China forced the regime to back down from its years-long pandemic policies—in other words, it is important to acknowledge that the people have won their first battle. But the work is far from over. During the pandemic, the Chinese regime's investment in long-term medical infrastructure that can could mitigate the pandemic's harms actually decreased, in favor of wasteful and anti-democratic testing and lockdown protocols. The government will inevitably face pressure on its medical system, and we may can anticipate its apologists to casting blame on the protestors. However, we must remember that the fundamental responsibility lies with the government.

In recent decades and especially during the pandemic, the Chinese government has continued its trend of privatizing key social services, and opening up workers to new forms of precarity and exploitation. Women in particular have faced the brunt of these measures. Childcare and other social benefits are rapidly being privatized or moved into 'public-private' models, and migrant and other women workers are caught between increasingly precarious jobs while bearing the weight of social reproduction.

At the same time, we must emphasize that women and other marginalized groups are at in the lead in providing increased political clarity to this inchoate mass movement. We wish to highlight the efforts of feminists and other marginalized groups that are taking the lead in challenging the more conservative elements of the protests within the spaces of mass action themselves. Overseas Chinese activists have pushed for putting forward the struggles of Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic groups as a central demand. Feminist and LGBTQ+ activists have not only led

local and overseas struggles, but some have even sought to struggle for better feminist processes against gender-based violence within protest spaces. We also recognize that the protests began in 'Xinjiang,' one of the most surveilled and repressed regions of China, where Uyghurs have been denied their right to self-determination for years. Many Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic peoples have been detained in "re-education camps," in the Chinese state's own words, which "[draw] on the practices of the UK, France and other countries," and are inspired by Israeli counter-insurgency tactics against Palestinians.

Socialists should strongly support the calls to self-determination by Uyghurs and others who demand it, even if Western imperialists seek to co-opt such demands. As Lenin said in 1916, "the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilized by another 'Great' Power in its equally imperialist interests should have no more weight in inducing Social Democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination than the numerous case of the bourgeoisie utilizing republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial robbery." Socialists must work hard to build alternatives to the collusion between Western imperial actors and certain Uyghur nationalist elites, while continuing to center Uyghurs' independent demands for self-determination in the context of this mass struggle.

How else can socialists contribute in this ongoing awakening in mass political consciousness? We welcome other socialist and anti-capitalist formations' efforts in showing solidarity to the protesters, and emphasize our commitment to helping to build a pluralistic social movement. As revolutionary socialists, we try our best to learn and synthesize lessons from all aspects of a mass movement by participating in the struggle. Our stance is clear: neither authoritarian bureaucratic capitalism nor bourgeois democracy can sufficiently fulfill people's fundamental democratic rights. What is needed is a multi-party system, democratically composed of workers', women's, and other organizations of the working-class and marginalized peoples under a broad-based anti-capitalist program. While we encourage the role of socialist organization to help advocate for these ideas, we do not seek to participate to take over or just to recruit, and attempt to substitute the self-activity and autonomy of the mass movement.

The most urgent task is to support and empower the mass movements in demanding their basic democratic rights: abolishing legislation that infringes on people's basic freedoms to speech, assembly, and self-organization. In particular, we agree with the spirit of Peng Lifa's demands, valiantly raised on Beijing's Sitong Bridge days before the CCP's National Congress this past October. Peng called for independent mass action from all sectors of civil society to demand universal suffrage and the abolition of Xi Jinping's dictatorial rule. However, we believe that a bourgeois parliamentary system, in which the fundamental class relations of society remain untouched, would not help, but in fact limit, a genuine vision of a democratic system based on economic redistribution and radical systemic reform.

Thus, we reiterate our support for the demands raised by local and overseas Hongkonger and Chinese socialists below.

1. Abolish lockdowns that forcibly detain people in their homes, denying them of access to basic needs.
2. Abolish forced PCR testing for COVID-19.
3. Allow those who are infected to isolate at home, while those with severe symptoms have the right to treatment in the hospital; cancel forcible transfer and isolation of infected and non-infected individuals in mobile cabin "hospitals".
4. Provide options for multiple vaccines, allowing individuals the right to choose their own healthcare.
5. Release Sitong Bridge protestor Peng Zaizhou and other political prisoners who are being detained from the protests.
6. Call for nation-wide mourning of the deaths of those caused by irresponsible lockdown measures.
7. Ensure the resignation of bureaucrats responsible for pandemic mismanagement.
8. Pandemic control measures must be informed by medical experts and conducted democratically amongst the people.
9. Safeguard the rights of people to the freedom of speech, assembly, organization, and protest.
10. Support independent workers' power in and beyond these protests; abolish anti-worker practices like the 996

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work schedule and strengthen labor law protections, including protecting workers' right to strike and self-organization, so they can participate more extensively in political life.

These demands seek to echo and synthesize the most progressive formulations of the demands on the ground, while opening up the possibility for a deeper critique of the Chinese political system to emerge: that the genuine fulfillment of these demands for democracy would only be possible in the overthrow of the commodity capitalist system from which the authoritarian Chinese regime draws its power. The task for socialists is to continue participating and encouraging mass action and self-organization in these protests, while discovering new ways to bridge between a minimum program for democratic reforms and revolutionary socialism. In light of the ongoing climate crisis, exacerbated by the inter-imperialist rivalry between the US and China, we believe that the antidote is ecosocialism, which centers on everyday people's capacity to democratically and collectively organize production, their own lives, and how society is run. This will not be possible without a robust and independent mass movement in China and in the rest of the world.

**Solidarity with the people across China, notably Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic groups living in the occupied lands of 'Xinjiang'!**

*19 December 2022*

*PS:*

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