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Hong Kong

The Chinese steamroller in Hong Kong goes into high gear

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The extension to Hong Kong of the freedom-destroying rules in force on the mainland is accelerating daily.

The Chinese government introduced a National Security Law on 30 June that allows for the prosecution in local or mainland courts of anyone accused of hostility to the regime. This law is in addition to emergency legislation dating back to the time of British colonisation, which has never been repealed. A sword of Damocles hangs over the 11,000 or so people who have been arrested since June 2019 (for a population of 7.5 million).

All variants of the opposition are harshly repressed

Protesters accused of being on the front lines of clashes with police can face sentences of up to ten years in prison. Only a small proportion of them are already in jail.

Much more moderate activists are also imprisoned. For example, since 3 December, young activists Joshua Wong, Agnès Chow and Ivan Lam have been imprisoned for their participation in the blockade of the police headquarters on 21 June 2019.

The very existence of the parliamentary opposition is called into question. While some of the MPs are in fact appointed by the government, it was nevertheless afraid of losing control of Parliament during the elections initially scheduled for 6 September. It feared that a new tidal wave would be created in favour of the opposition candidates as far as the MPs elected by the population were concerned. In the local elections of November 2019, the opposition won 86% of the seats to be filled. Not wanting to run any risk, the government has simply postponed these elections for a year, citing the pandemic.

Four deputies were also dismissed on 11 November. In solidarity, almost all opposition MPs resigned. The Hong Kong Parliament now clearly appears to be a mere recording chamber for decisions taken in Beijing.

On 23 August, the Chinese navy boarded the boat with which twelve opponents tried to escape from Hong Kong. They are now detained on the mainland, and have not even been allowed to choose their lawyers.

Anti-union repression

Freedom of speech is at risk. On 1 December, forty investigative journalists from a private television station were fired overnight under pressure from the Chinese government, and another sixty layoffs are planned. Government intrusion into the public broadcasting channel is increasing.

Jimmy Lai, a wealthy media owner independent of the government, was taken into custody on 3 December on the grounds that the headquarters of his main media outlet would be used for purposes other than those provided for in the building's rental contract!

Many employees have been dismissed for striking, participating in demonstrations or even for having made anti-government comments . The general secretary of one of the air transport unions was dismissed following the strikes in the summer of 2019. Reprisals are underway in the public health sector following the massive strike in February 2020 that forced the Hong Kong government to finally take some measures against the pandemic. Civil servants are now prohibited from any words or actions that could be considered hostile to the government.

Even if it is increasing in a worrying fashion, the "normalization" of Hong Kong is far from complete. There is still resistance to this and it needs international solidarity more than ever.

10 December 2020

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