

Hong Kong politics

Hong Kong shaken by removal of pro-democracy lawmakers

Beijing intensifies crackdown on dissent in semi-autonomous territory



Nathan Law, left, and Leung Kwok-hung, right, are among the four lawmakers ousted from the Hong Kong Legislative Council © AFP

Ben Bland in Hong Kong JULY 14, 2017

Four pro-democracy lawmakers have been ousted from Hong Kong's legislature by the city's High Court for failing to take their oaths properly, in the latest sign of Beijing's intensifying [crackdown on dissent](#) in the semi-autonomous territory.

The judgment on Friday came after a controversial instruction from the Chinese government last year ordering [Hong Kong](#) to remove officials and lawmakers who do not "sincerely believe in and strictly abide by" their oath of allegiance to China.

The decision to remove the four lawmakers, who are considering an appeal, deprives the democratic opposition in Hong Kong's partially elected Legislative Council of the numbers to block some major legislation. It will exacerbate the bitter divisions that are riling the city of 7.4m people, where Beijing has increased its interventions despite promising "a high degree of autonomy" to Hong Kong for 50 years from 1997.

It is more important than ever for Hong Kong to stay strong and firm

Earlier this month, on a visit to Hong Kong to celebrate 20 years since the handover of the former British colony, China's President Xi Jinping [warned Hong Kongers](#) not to cross Beijing's "red line" by "undermining national

against the autocracy

Demosisto

sovereignty” or “challenging the power of the central government”.

The ousted lawmakers include veteran activist Leung Kwok-hung, better known as “Long Hair”, and [Nathan Law](#), who became the youngest ever legislator in Hong Kong when he was elected in September at the age of 23.

The court ruled that Mr Law had questioned China’s sovereignty over Hong Kong by “adopting a rising intonation” when he said the word “country” during his oath. Mr Leung was disqualified in part for holding a yellow umbrella, the symbol of the pro-democracy Occupy movement in 2014, during his swearing-in.

The two other lawmakers removed were Edward Yiu and Lau Siu-lai.

Carrie Lam, Hong Kong’s new chief executive, welcomed the ruling, saying that while she wants Hong Kongers to be happy, “building bridges has to be done in a lawful way”.

Mr Law’s party, Demosisto, said it “condemns the manifest interference of the Beijing government to cripple Hong Kong’s legislative power”.

“It is more important than ever for Hong Kong to stay strong and firm against the autocracy,” it said.

Priscilla Leung, a pro-Beijing lawmaker, said that the 127,000 voters who backed the four ousted lawmakers in September’s election should “reconsider whether they have chosen the right person”.

Friday’s decision follows the [removal](#) on similar grounds of two young legislators who supported Hong Kong independence in November.

Antony Dapiran, a lawyer and author of a history of protest in Hong Kong, said that the court was “acting on Beijing’s vaguely worded will to kick out six democratically elected legislators on a very flimsy pretext”.

Mabel Au, the Hong Kong director for Amnesty International, the human rights campaign group, said that the decision “confirms the Hong Kong government’s agenda to silence and effectively punish any speech critical of the present political system, wherever it may occur”.

“By bringing these cases, the Hong Kong government only reinforces the impression that they are mere puppets of Beijing,” she added.

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