

Background To The Report

On February 13, 2019, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG), led by Chief Executive Carrie Lam, introduced a controversial bill to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, Cap. 503 and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance, Cap. 525 (hereafter called the “Extradition Bill”). The ostensible reason given for the amendment was to enable the extradition of a murder suspect in Hong Kong to Taiwan for trial. No formal extradition agreement existed between the two territories.

But the amendment, if passed, would have also made possible the extradition of fugitive offenders in Hong Kong for trial in the courts in the Mainland of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) for offences committed in the Mainland. Such extraditions were not hitherto legally possible under Hong Kong law.

Given the many fundamental differences between the legal systems of Hong Kong and the PRC, opposition to the proposed Extradition Bill soon mushroomed and gathered momentum. Hong Kong’s pan democrats, dissidents, journalists, lawyers, accountants, even businessmen and other members of the public all had reasons to oppose the amendment. Various feasible alternatives were put forward by different parties. But the HKSAR Government rejected the suggestions proposed by the opposition, while accepting some of those put forward by the pro-establishment camp. It refused all calls for further consultation and tried to fast-track the passing of the Extradition Bill by leapfrogging the Committee Stage of the legislative proceedings which would have subjected the Extradition Bill to close scrutiny and amendment.

This so incensed the public that, on June 9, 2019, over one million people took to the streets in a protest march organized by the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF). This was a peaceful demonstration attended by a record number of people.

But, later that night, the HKSARG, led by Chief Executive Carrie Lam, made light of the strength of the opposition to the Extradition Bill and decided to press ahead with its Second Reading in the Legislative Council. This flagrant disregard of clearly and peacefully expressed public opinion so enraged the public that some of them decided to return and lay siege to the Legislative Council Complex on June 12 – in order to try and stop the Second Reading of the Extradition Bill.

The HKSAR Government summoned the police to disperse the crowd and, in the ensuing clashes between police and protesters, tear gas, bean-bag rounds and rubber bullets flew. The television cameras captured much of the action on film. The use of firearms on the unarmed crowd by the police force was seen by many as gratuitous and over the top. The confrontation and the test of strength between the police and the protesters descended into violence.

Three days later, on June 15, Carrie Lam announced that the HKSARG had decided to suspend work on the Extradition Bill. But by then it was too late. On the following day, another protest march organized by CHRF was attended by two million people and the demands had multiplied. The protesters wanted the withdrawal of the Bill (not just its suspension), the establishment of an Independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate police brutality, the retraction of the “riots” characterization (what the police were calling protesters), the release of all persons arrested in relation to the protests, and the resignation of Carrie Lam. This was no longer just about the Extradition Bill.

When none of these demands was being met, some protesters gathered again on July 1, 2019 and stormed their way into the Legislative Council Complex.

On July 9, 2019, Chief Executive Carrie Lam finally announced that work on the Extradition Bill “had been put to rest” and that “the Bill is dead”. If she had done so a month ago, after the first march of a million, subsequent events might not have taken place. But by this time only one of the five demands had been met and the protests not only continued but grew in number and intensity.

The Role Of Project Citizens Foundation

Board members of Project Citizens Foundation watched these events unfold in June and July with increasing alarm.

To try to understand the strong public resentment against the Extradition Bill, the changes in public sentiment over time, and the calamitous events which had taken place, Project Citizens Foundation decided to commission the Hong Kong Public Opinion Program (HKPOP) under the auspices of the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI) to conduct a Hong Kong-based survey and to produce an objective and comprehensive public sentiment report of the

movement.

The budget for this project was set at HK\$1 million and the money was raised through the crowd-funding platform Collaction. The target amount was reached on July 11, within just 30 hours. The project received funding from nearly 4,300 supporters, with each person contributing an average of HK\$250.

The design and execution of the research project is completely independent of Project Citizens Foundation. HKPOP is an autonomous organization and is solely responsible for the research findings and the interpretations contained in this Report.

Project Citizens Foundation is pleased that the project has been accomplished. The findings of HKPOP not only make interesting reading for people in government, but also academics, researchers and public spirited individuals who wish to understand a complex and highly explosive socio-political phenomenon. Something like this has never happened in Hong Kong's history. We can only hope that the Hong Kong SAR Government would take this piece of research seriously and learn from its grievous mistakes which have plunged Hong Kong into a prolonged crisis of unprecedented magnitude.

If good governance is really the goal of this administration, it must understand that a government can only govern effectively if it governs with the consent of the people.

Acknowledgement

Project Citizens Foundation wishes to thank all donors who have contributed to this worthwhile project.