



By: TA | AP Insight

The disbandment of the last opposition movement in Hong Kong



Hong Kong has lost its last pro-democracy political party as Beijing continues to exert political pressure on opposition activists. The "one country, two systems" principle advocated by Beijing practically no longer exists.

Hong Kong pro-democracy political party League of Social Democrats announced on Sunday it had disbanded due to immense political pressure, the latest casualty in a years-long **crackdown** that has already quieted much of the city's once-vocal opposition.

Following massive anti-government protests in 2019, many leading activists were prosecuted or jailed under a 2020 national security law **imposed** by Beijing. Dozens of civil society groups dissolved. Media outlets critical of the government shuttered.

The League of Social Democrats was the only pro-democracy party that still staged small street protests from time to time and held street booth activities to carry on its advocacy despite the risks.

Its chairperson, Chan Po-ying, **said** the disbandment decision was made after careful deliberation, especially taking into account the consequences to its members and comrades.

Chan refused to elaborate on the pressure but said she was proud to say that the party had still contributed to the city's pro-democracy movement in these few years.

"We have stayed true to our original aspirations and haven't let down to the trust placed in us by those who went to prison," she said. "While we are now forced to disband and feel an ache in our conscience, we have no other choice," she said.

Protests became rare under Beijing's grip

Hong Kong, a former British colony, will mark the 28th anniversary of returning to Chinese rule on July 1. The city used to hold annual pro-

democracy **protests** that day and other various demonstrations demanding better policies.

But those were ceased after most organizing groups were **disbanded** and the leading activists were jailed.

Critics say the drastic political changes under the security law reflect that the freedoms Beijing promised to keep intact in 1997 are **shrinking**.

The Beijing and Hong Kong governments insist the law is necessary for the city's stability. A Chinese official overseeing Hong Kong affairs in 2023 **said** protests are not the only way for people to express their views, signaling Beijing's stance toward demonstrations in the city.

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Party veterans told The Associated Press that some members were warned of consequences if the party didn't shut down. A final vote is expected at a later date.

Chan said she believed the "one country, two systems" principle, which Beijing uses to govern Hong Kong, has already ended, pointing to the Chinese government's imposition of the security law and introducing the idea of "soft resistance," a term officials use to refer to underlying security risks.

"One country, two systems has already (become) one country, one system," she said.

A party known for confrontational tactics

Founded in 2006, the League of Social Democrats was a left-wing political party that opposed what it called collusion between government and business, upheld the principle that people have a say and was firmly committed to the interests of underprivileged residents.

It was widely known for its more aggressive tactics when fighting for change.



Leung Kwok-hung was disqualified from the legislature due to his manner of taking his oath in office in 2017

Its members have thrown bananas, eggs and luncheon meat at officials or pro-Beijing lawmakers as a protest gesture.

Its party platform said the group advocated non-violent resistance but would not avoid physical confrontations — a stance that set it apart from older, traditional pro-democracy groups.

It once had three lawmakers in office. Its longest-serving lawmaker, Leung Kwok-hung — Chan's husband — was disqualified from the legislature due to his manner of taking his oath in office in 2017.

Members arrested and jailed over activism

On the streets, the group's activism led to the arrests and jailing of its members from time to time.

Last year, Leung and prominent LGBTQ+ activist Jimmy Sham, a former party leader,

were sentenced to nearly seven years and more than four years over their roles in an unofficial primary election under the sweeping security law. Sham was freed from prison last month.

In recent years, the party has had limited political influence, no longer holding any seats in the legislature or local district councils. Even a bank ceased to provide bank account services to the group.

But it continued to stage small protests from time to time, despite sometimes those activities leading to arrests.

Moving forward is not at all easy - Chan Po-ying

On June 12, Chan and other members were fined after being found guilty over their street booth activities.

Undeterred by their convictions, they kept pressing on and protested against the ruling outside the court.

Chan wiped away tears during Sunday's press conference and chanted slogans with other members at the end.

She said she doesn't believe that democracy will come in the near future.

"Moving forward is not at all easy," she said. "I hope everyone can become like an ember, a flying spark — still carrying light, keeping that light alive, no matter how small it may be."