

**No Honeymoon for Hong Kong CE-elect**  
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***Leung shows a disturbing proclivity to revive anti-subversion act***

Leung Chun-ying will start his term as Hong Kong's chief executive with the fewest votes of any person to fill the office over the past three Election Committee cycles and with the lowest approval ratings. His approval rating at 35 percent is less than half what his predecessors Tung Chee-hwa and Donald Tsang started with.

One good reason for the disfavor stems from the accusatory finger that Henry Tang wagged at Leung at the final debate between the contenders for urging riot police action to stop the 2003 public march of over half a million residents against the draconian Article 23 Security Bill that the government was forced to withdraw.

"I heard what you said with my own ears," Tang thundered, for once transcending his silly public grin. He was genuinely angry and indignant. That sealed his fate with the party bosses in Beijing – and added credence to persistent rumors of CY Leung's underground communist status and jackboot tendencies.

Leung denied that he had urged truncheons, tear gas, pepper-spray or water cannons be used on the marchers. Confident that executive council minutes only record points of agreed action and not verbatim accounts, Leung even pledged to release relevant minutes to "clear the allegations". Tellingly, no one else from that fateful executive council meeting stood up for Leung or contradicted Henry Tang.

The trouble with Article 23

The Article 23 provisions, which resulted in the biggest demonstration in modern Hong Kong history, would have allowed the banning of any organization also banned by Beijing – such as Falun Gong, for instance – without the government having to conduct an independent investigation. It would have allowed the police to conduct warrantless searches at any time, anywhere. A sedition provision would have given the government the power to decide what would be considered provocative speech – written, spoken or delivered on the Internet. It would also have made it a crime to listen to such speech and fail to report it.

Those subject to the law would have been citizens and all permanent Hong Kong residents – no matter where they reside, in or out of the territory. It would have included people who visited or transited through Hong Kong as well. Those violating Article 23 were potentially subject to life in prison.

The unpopularity of the proposed law resulted in the forced resignation of Regina Ip as secretary for security. Tang's disclosure also panicked Ip, another future chief executive hopeful, who was secretary for security then and has as much to hide about that shameful incident. She was in charge of the uniformed services waiting for the green light.

Henry Tang must thank fate for being a Hong Kong citizen under the "One Country, Two

Systems" principle instead of the One Country, One System regime in China. No gang of secret police kicked down his doors to whisk him away in the dead of night to an undisclosed location to be beaten into signing a 'confession' or fed mercury-laced food to kill him slowly. His wife and children are not under constant surveillance. No security cameras spy on him. No police thugs squat in unmarked cars both ends of his street. He cannot be 'disappeared'. In fact the man is leaving for a vacation break in a huff.

CE-elect dashes to Central Liaison Office

Perhaps decades of regular visits and coaching at the Central Liaison Office of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office have become a fixed routine for Leung. His dash there the day after his selection, went down like a lead balloon. It was unseemly and undignified for Hong Kong's next leader to be running to shadowy minders at the CLO.

He forgot that he is now the leader-elect of Hong Kong. If the Central Liaison Office folk want to see him, surely they can book an appointment at his office? Was he there to thank them for delivering the selection for him? Was he grateful they pressured the Select Committee probing his West Kowloon Center project indiscretion to delay till after 25th March?

Citizens were left wondering whether Leung was their chief executive-elect or Beijing's under-cover mole. The radio waves, talk shows and press were electrified with denunciations. One columnist in the South China Morning Post warned of the 'long nightmare' ahead.

Obligation to pass Article 23?

Of all the priorities on the plate of the incoming chief executive, Leung has unwisely resurrected the dreaded Article 23 to the top of his agenda. He pledged to consult widely for consensus. The message Hong Kong citizens delivered so unequivocally on 1st July 2003 seems not to have registered.

Leung risks provoking a Hong Kong already suspicious, wary and angry at the stage-managed, small-circle election and the blatant interference of the Central Liaison Office apparatchiks. They do not trust him or them. The consensus he will find on Article 23 is that Hong Kong citizens do not want it.

They may be denied universal franchise and have unwanted leaders imposed on them but Hong Kong citizens have shown they will stand up for their first world freedoms.

Article 23 has little relevance for security in the territory. External defense and international relations are mandates of the People's Republic of China. Article 23 has all the tools for clamping down on rights and freedoms which distinguish the city from the rest of China and much of Asia.

Chinese scholar Wong Yiu-chong analyzed the attempt to insert Article 23 into HK's Basic Law in the Asia Perspective Journal (Kyungnam University, South Korea) as the "Leninist integration" strategy of steady absorption.

Citizens of Hong Kong indicated their rejection of the farcical CE election exercise and all

three candidates, by casting a whopping 55 percent blank protest vote in the mock election organized by the HKU Public Opinion Poll over the two days preceding the Election Committee voting. Those who picked from the three tallied 17.8 percent for CY Leung, 16.3 percent for Henry Tang and 11.4 for Albert Ho.

Despite the online voting computers being hacked and disabled, 223,000 people from all walks of life switched to the inconvenience of queuing to cast paper votes at 15 stations set up for the purpose. The organizers had only expected about 50,000 participants even for the online exercise! That should give the Beijing bosses pause for thought on how deep feelings run.

Leung has to be cognizant of the extremely weak position he is starting from. He has already stumbled badly even before he takes office. He cannot be seen as a stooge of the Central Liaison Office. Whether he is a closet communist is beside the point. That is his problem - not Hong Kong's.

The new chief executive will have no 'honeymoon' allowance. He has to grow into a true leader of 7 million pro-active citizens quickly or find it impossible to govern. He is too sharp and too diligent to fail so obviously. He may yet prove his critics wrong. The only trajectory available to him is up.

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