



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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International migrant workers and activists protest the Sixth Ministerial of the World Trade Organization in Hong Kong, 2005

11 December

2005

to: 18 December

2005

Country: China

Location City/State/Province: *Hong Kong*

Location Description: *Area surrounding the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center*

Goals:

To de-rail the Sixth Ministerial of the World Trade Organization, being held in Hong Kong, and if that failed - to force WTO delegates to produce a fairer deal for poor nations in the trade negotiations by making rich countries' markets more open to goods from the developing world.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 038. Marches

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 050. Teach-ins
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Hong Kong activists
- International Activists
- International migrant workers and farmers (mainly from Korea and parts of Southeast Asia)

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Hong Kong People's Alliance

Partners:

South Korean farmers, Asian Migrant Center, Indonesian and Filipino migrants, and many others were all partners in the protest

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Hong Kong People's Alliance

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 1-2 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Hong Kong Police Force and the World Trade Organization

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

There were isolated incidents of protesters using violence. On December 13th, some South Korean farmers used bamboo sticks to break through a roadblock set up by police and engaged in physical clashes with the riot police. On December 17th, some protesters also violently clashed with police as they attempted to break through police lines and as they were being sprayed by police with pepper spray, tear gas, and water hoses.

Repressive Violence:

On Saturday December 17th, police responded to protesters' attempts to break through police lines by donning gas masks and propping up riot shields while using pepper spray, tear gas, and water hoses to break up protesters. They also arrested hundreds of protesters. Additionally, on Sunday December 18th, the police encircled protesters outside of the Convention Center at 3:20 in the morning and dragged them into police vehicles to be arrested and moved away from the area.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

The Sixth Ministerial of the World Trade Organization met from 13-18 December 2005. In this Ministerial, the WTO hoped to move forward after the collapse of trade negotiations in the WTO's Fifth Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico in 2003. The WTO aimed for the Sixth Ministerial to arrive on a final deal to reach a conclusion in the Doha Round, the name of the current trade-negotiation round that commenced in November 2001 with the Fifth Ministerial of the WTO meeting in Doha, Qatar and that had been stalled due to disagreements that continued to arise in subsequent WTO meetings after 2001.

In the early months of 2005, local segments of civil society within Hong Kong began preparing to protest at the sixth ministerial. The Hong Kong People's Alliance on the WTO (HKPA) was formed on 22 September 2004, composed of different grassroots organizations such as trade unions and community labor groups. The HKPA hosted an International Coordination Network Meeting in Hong Kong on 26-27 February 2005, where more than 200 delegates from around 80 countries attended. At the meeting, the Alliance and other international organizations prepared a preliminary schedule for actions to be taken during the week of the ministerial – specifically agreeing for a week of activities called “People's Action Week” and for HKPA to organize space for protesters as well as for HKPA to coordinate protests on 11, 13, and 18 of December. HKPA aimed to disrupt the Sixth Ministerial through its protests, but also hoped that its presence would put pressure on WTO delegates at the ministerial to produce a fairer deal for poorer countries in the trade negotiations.

In the days leading up to the first day of the ministerial on 13 December, thousands of people arrived in Hong Kong and the base for the majority of protesters' actions and organization occurred in Victoria Park. Throughout the week, between an estimated 6,000 and 10,000 protesters showed up to protest the negotiations. The largest group among the protesters was South Korean farmers who came to the WTO conference with a more specific aim. The South Korean farmers opposed measures being considered by WTO delegates to lower trade barriers within their country for agricultural imports, which they said would flood

South Korea with cheap imports like rice and force the nation's farmers out of business. Another large group within the protesters were migrant workers, especially those from Indonesia and the Philippines. Groups like the Asian Migrant Center, which was also part of the HKPA, was able to link groups from Indonesia and the Philippines with the Indonesian and Filipino migrants in Hong Kong, providing connections to groups already on the ground in Hong Kong and delegations coming from abroad. Groups prepared to organize outside of the meeting location for the Ministerial: the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, located in Wan Chai North.

Small-scale protests and other actions took place every day during the meeting of the Ministerial. Groups such as Our World is Not for Sale carried out media stunts and other actions to capture delegates' attention and communicate their message to WTO delegates inside the Convention Center. Forums, teach-ins, film showings, and street art events were held outside. Concerts took place almost every night in addition to numerous demonstrations and marches by different groups. Protesters marched to government offices wearing T-shirts with slogans like "Junk the WTO" and "Stop collusion between government and business". One particular march was held by the Korean delegation called "Sam-bo-it-bae" that means three steps, one bow – which is a form of Buddhist meditation.

On 11 December, the Sunday before the WTO summit was to begin, about 3000 protesters marched from Victoria Park to the Hong Kong government's main trade office. Protesters carried colorful banners with different slogans denouncing globalization. Protesters from the Militant Korean Peasants League held a banner that said, "This hamburger is made of people's meat. Can you enjoy it?" The sign showed a picture of hamburger made of hands and feet. A Filipino migrant group held signs saying, "Resist Imperialist Plunder and War". Other demonstrators pounded on drums and clanged cymbals. British activist Tom Grundy was dressed like a chicken and held a sign that said, "WTO: more dangerous than chicken flu." Activists with the Indonesian Migrants' Workers Union carried a giant spider with monster's head, which they said symbolized the WTO and chanted "Sink WTO now." Members of the Indian farmers' group Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement chanted, "WTO out of agriculture."

On the morning of Tuesday 13 December, the first day of the ministerial, a group of fishermen from Southeast Asia along with supporters from other international organizations, held a parade in the waters of Victoria Harbor. Protesters sailed two boats in Victoria Harbor, carrying colorful banners that called on the WTO to remove fisheries from the WTO's non-agricultural market access (NAMA) negotiations. Some fisherman also jumped into the cold water to unfurl a banner stating their demands.

Additionally, on 13 December, South Korean farmers, estimated by local media to number between 2000 and 4000, marched through the city to protest their specific objection to opening their domestic market to international competition. A few blocks from the conference site, a small number of farmers wielding bamboo sticks tried to break through a roadblock and clashed with riot police who responded with pepper spray. While this was happening, an estimated 70 South Korean farmers wearing orange lifejackets leapt into Victoria Harbor to also express their protest against the talks.

On Saturday 17 December, Korean peasants and workers led a march from Victoria Park to the Convention Center. On Saturday, protesters attempted to break through a police line around the Convention Center that marked the designated protest zone. When attempts failed, between 1000 and 1500 protesters split into smaller groups of about 12 each, fleeing police who pursued them over several square blocks, creating confusion among the police. Then protesters returned to the area around the convention center and continue trying to push forward through the police line. In response, the police donned gas masks and propped riot shields while using pepper spray, tear gas, and fire hoses to dissuade protesters trying to edge closer to the convention center. Before Saturday, demonstrations had been largely peaceful. However, the South Korean protesters had vowed to step up their protests prior to Saturday.

The police ultimately prevented people from regrouping and arrested hundreds of protesters. According to Hong Kong Police Commissioner Dick Lee, forty-one people were reported injured on Saturday. While arrests occurred, a South Korean urged his fellow demonstrators, via megaphone, to continue the protests but reduce the violence and be arrested with dignity, by lying down and being taken away in a nonviolent action. Though the violence eventually subsided, protesters refused to leave the area. Police made between 900 and 1,000 arrests and protesters who were not arrested organized and attended a vigil in front of the

jail, where they demanded the prisoners' release. By the end of the ministerial, the police released all prisoners except 14, who continued to remain in police custody. After the violence of Saturday's demonstrations, protest leaders considered abandoning their plans for Sunday's protest actions but ultimately decided to have their scheduled march and rally for the day proceed as planned.

On Sunday 18 December, the last day of the ministerial, police came in the very early hours of the morning to disperse the crowds of protesters gathered outside the Convention Center. Protesters had gathered outside to hold banners, chant slogans, bang drums, and sing songs. Police had warned protesters, who had paralyzed the city center for hours by gathering in the area, to leave the streets outside of the Convention Center.

Around 3:20am, police moved into the fray, linking hands to form a cordon around the activists, then dragging them out and into nearby police vans.

While these protests were the worst Hong Kong had seen in decades, protesters were not ultimately able to prevent a deal being successfully agreed upon in the ministerial that hammered out some more details on trade agreements and agricultural issues. The G90 countries were promised the "Round for Free" – an agreement that the G90 countries would have duty-free, quota-free market access to developed countries. However, while the US had promised to remove 97% of its tariffs, the remaining 3% covered many products that were of interest to G90 countries and those tariffs remained enforced.

Research Notes

Influences:

(1) The protesters in Hong Kong were influenced by the protests at the previous WTO Ministerial in Cancun (see Mexican and international activists disrupt the Fifth Ministerial of the World Trade Organization in Cancun, 2003).

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Rosanna Kim, 11/11/2012

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