

Hong Kong / Politics

## Bring justice to those killed in 1967 Hong Kong riots, attendees demand at 50th anniversary event

In a first, pro-Beijing lawmakers and labour unions join retired leftist workers at memorial service for those who died 50 years ago in city's worst ever unrest



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Attendees at the memorial service in Fanling on Sunday. Photo: Sam Tsang

Bring justice to the patriotic “heroes” who gave their lives to the anti-colonial government riots in 1967, over 100 retired leftist workers demanded on the 50th anniversary of Hong Kong’s worst ever unrest.

And for the first time ever, they were joined by pro-Beijing lawmakers and labour unions to commemorate the incident, which left over 50 dead and remains a sensitive topic to this day.



The memorial service at Wo Hop Shek cemetery paid tribute to all those killed in the 1967 incidents. Photo: Sam Tsang

On Sunday, the group of mostly leftists and their families arrived at Wo Hop Shek public cemetery in Fanling, where 16 fellow workers killed during the riots were buried.

After a moment’s silence, a speech was read out by Chan Shi-yuen of the 67 Synergy Group, which has organised the annual memorial service since 2011.

“Martyrs, we did not forget. Fifty years ago you sacrificed yourselves to defend the nation’s dignity and Hongkongers’ interests,” he said.

“[But] your families were left in endless anger, grief and hardships ... we must demand justice. You are not rioters. You are national heroes!”

**We must demand justice. You are not rioters. You are national heroes!**Chan Shi-yuen, 67 Synergy

**Group**

He confirmed later that an exhibition would be held in the coming months to show the public the “real” history of what had happened.

The Federation of Trade Unions, which was instrumental in organising the protests at the time, had sent representatives on Sunday after remaining silent on the topic for years.

Federation of Trade Unions vice-chairman Tong Kang-yiu added 26 workers were unlawfully killed during the eight-month unrest, with nearly 5,000 others arrested.

“The 1960s was an era of corruption and hardship ... our struggles led to the government acknowledging the issues and paved the way for improvements in [many aspects],” Tong said.

Alongside guests such as lawmakers Luk Chung-hung and Ng Leung-sing, participants bowed three times and laid flowers on the graves to pay their respects.

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Attendees included 91-year-old Kwok Hing-lau, who was vice-chairman of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Painters' General Union who could still vividly recall his role during the riots.

One of his tasks was to produce bombs.

“It was the most effective way to deal with the oppression by the colonial government,” he said, adding that a lack of historical education prevented more from joining them on the streets.

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Kwok's then-apprentice Chan Ping-kee, who was part of a "frontline combat unit" aimed at creating disturbances, was caught with possessing hand grenades and sentenced to four years in jail.

"We never felt we had committed a crime," he said.

But others were less decisive. Tang Wing-to, who was one year old when his father was shot dead during the riots, admitted he did not know which side to take since the incident was so controversial.

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"It is a tragedy," he said. "But no one should forget history."

A spillover from the Cultural Revolution on mainland China, the 1967 riots were sparked by a labour dispute at an artificial flower factory in San Po Kong in April that year.

The pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions played a pivotal role in escalating the labour incident into a full-blown riot.

Yeung Kwong, its chairman at the time, served as director of the Anti-British Struggle Committee, which was widely blamed for a series of violent protests, including the production and deployment of bombs on the streets.

The row ended only after then premier Zhou Enlai expressed Beijing's official disapproval in December that year.