

# The Big 4 firms of accountants oppose democracy in Hong..

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The [FT has reported this morning that](#):

*The big four global accounting companies have taken out press advertisements in Hong Kong stating they are “opposed” to the territory’s democracy movement, warning that their multinational clients may quit the city if activists carry out their threats to disrupt business with street protests.*

*In an unusual joint statement published in three Chinese-language Hong Kong newspapers on Friday, the local offices of EY, KPMG, Deloitte and PwC said the Occupy Central movement, which is calling for electoral reform in the former British colony, posed a threat to the territory’s rule of law.*

Many in the tax justice movement, [and Prof Prem Sikka in particular](#), have long pointed out that the Big 4 firms of accountants (PwC, Deloitte, KPMG and EY) represent a substantial threat to democracy since they are the almost universal and consistent presence in tax havens who have as a result underpinned the organised tax avoidance that those places facilitate to undermine the tax revenues of democratically elected governments. This new declaration by these firms is, however, something that has taken many of us involved in this movement by surprise.

The demands of the Hong Kong democracy movement can hardly be considered radical to most people used to the benefits that democracy has created throughout large parts of the world and yet here we have the Big 4 firms of accountants suggesting that a protest to demand what is a basic human right is a threat to business and should, therefore, be opposed.

The dividing line between the camps could not be more stark. Hong Kong’s system of government is deeply discriminatory with just 1,200 people drawn from the city’s elite being allowed to vote for their preferred candidate from a shortlist of names managed by Beijing. The Occupy Central movement wants a universal franchise.

The Big 4 oppose the calls for peaceful protest in support of this call for democracy

saying, according to the FT translation of the Big 4 statement:

*In Opposition to the Occupy Central Movement*

*With regards to some individuals proposing an 'occupy central' movement, we hereby announce that we are opposed to this movement, and are concerned that 'occupy central' would have negative and long-lasting impact on the rule of law, the society, and the economy of Hong Kong. We hope that the disagreements could be resolved through negotiation and dialogue instead.*

*The rule of law is a core value of Hong Kong and has been the last bastion in Hong Kong's good business environment and its ability to attract foreign investment. Acting lawfully and respecting the rights of others is the responsibility of every citizen.*

As with all the Occupy movements the aim is peaceful protest. This [is all people's basic human right](#), although many governments try to curtail it. And it is an absurd claim to suggest that 'respecting the rights of others' must mean giving up a right to demand democratic representation. This is, again, a fundamental [misunderstanding of the UN Declaration of Human Rights](#), not least because it would necessarily mean that some have more rights than others. It is very hard not to conclude that this is the situation which the Big 4 firms of accountants wish to maintain.

*We have over time seen an increase in the, to date, slightly veiled threats to democracy that have emanated from these firms and, for example, from the City of London ( [who recently suggested the right of an elite to veto UK tax law, making clear that they considered democracy and convenience in the process](#)) but now we have specific evidence that these firms think that if democracy gets in the way of what they believed to be their right to conduct multinational business then they have no doubt in which side their sympathy lies.*

*Money matters to the Big 4. Democracy clearly does not. Neoliberalism is beginning to show its very very ugly side when it comes to human rights.*