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THE MYTH OF APATHY:

HONG KONG

SOCIETY AND POLITICS,

1966 - 1985

A Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
at Massey University

Vanessa Hall

1996

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a difficult year full of frequent moments of despair and elation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who helped in my quest to bring this project to completion.

The staff of Massey University History Department, Professor Kerry Howe, Dr Julie-Ann Smith for her comments and advice, and my supervisor Dr Katharine Davidson for her guidance and support in my moments of insecurity.

Rae Gendall and Annette Holm of Massey University Library interloans for their good humoured attendance to my frequent queries and requests.

Maria Milligan and Papiya Chakravarti of the Document Supply Service, and Paul Livingston, Officer in Charge of Newspapers, at the National Library of Australia, for coming to my rescue and allowing me to interloan the *Hong Kong Hansard* and *South China Morning Post*.

My family and friends for their love and support.

Finally an extra special thank you to my class mates who kept me going in the tough times. And especially Su and D, thanks for all the good times through out the year and for just being there.

Again, thank you all.

ABSTRACT

It has been widely accepted for many years that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic. This myth of apathy was a construct manufactured by supporters of the colonial status quo; that was a benevolent autocracy which was opposed to any constitutional political reform in the colony. The time frame this thesis examines is from the Kowloon riots of 1966 to the first elections to the Legislative Council in 1985. During this period there were many indications that the people of Hong Kong were not apathetic. However the objective of the colonial authorities was to maintain political control and the myth of apathy was used to achieve this objective. The colonial government of Hong Kong reinforced its legitimacy by reiterating that they were governing by consensus through consultation channels with the public. This though was not the reality. The colonial government consciously and effectively deprived the people of Hong Kong of a voice in the administration of the colony. Any political reforms that were conceded were instituted to placate the public and in no way altered the constitutional frame work of the colony. Social and political reforms made by the colonial authorities were designed to diminish discontent and therefore potential political agitation. The people of Hong Kong were never politically apathetic.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature discussing the longevity of an antiquated colonial system of government in Hong Kong reiterates the statement that the people of Hong Kong are politically apathetic. Statements such as the following, by a well respected Hong Kong academic, Dr Lau Siu-kai, are typical of this mindset: "The Chinese society of Hong Kong is composed largely of immigrants and their offspring. Motivated primarily by economic aspirations, they are blatantly utilitarian in inclination and passionately apolitical or anti-political."¹ This apathy has been consistently used by the government as an excuse for the lack of constitutional reform and representative government in Hong Kong. Because of the absence of militant opposition to the government, this supposed political apathy has essentially become an unquestioned assumption about the people of Hong Kong. This has helped to create a current international mindset relieving Britain of responsibility for the political fate of Hong Kong's people after 1997, when Hong Kong returns to communist China.² Statements that the Hong Kong people are politically apathetic remain the dominate view when discussing the lack of political participation in Hong Kong, as Dr Lau's statement, written in 1986, shows.

Aline K. Wong, writing in 1970/71, offers an alternative view to the standard argument that the Chinese people have no desire to be involved in politics. But this view still asserts the existence of political apathy, though it gives other than traditional arguments for this apathy:

The political apathy of the Hong Kong Chinese ... must be understood within the context of the present political system and with reference to the past record of constitutional reforms. The lack of political involvement on the part of many people is a consequence of their indifference toward the existing form of

¹ Lau Siu-kai, 'The Changing Political Culture of the Hong Kong Chinese', in *Hong Kong in Transition* (ed) Joseph Y.S. Cheng (Oxford, 1986), p.26.

² Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, Kowloon peninsula (situated on Mainland China) was ceded to Britain by the First Convention of Peking in 1860. The New Territories (also on the mainland) were leased to Britain for 99 years by the Second Convention of Peking in 1898. This lease is due to expire in 1997. Massive industrial expansion into the New Territories during the 1970s made this area an integral part of Hong Kong's economy and society essentially making Hong Kong unviable without this area. Under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed in 1984, the entire territory of Hong Kong will be returned to China in 1997.

limited representation and of their disillusionment with the Hong Kong Government in introducing constitutional reforms.³

Wong says of her paper, written over 25 years ago: "The line of argument taken in this paper is in contrast to a widely held belief, especially in official circles, that the Chinese residents in Hong Kong do not desire any large-scale participation in the governmental process."⁴ Though I dispute Wong's thesis of apathy I will expand upon and add to Wong's argument of limited representation and lack of constitutional reform to enforce the central purpose of my thesis which is to refute the claim that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic.

The time frame this thesis will examine is from 1966 when Hong Kong experienced major riots, to the first election of the Legislative Council in 1985. This time frame has been chosen as it covers the recent historical background to the 1997 British departure from Hong Kong that puts the lie to British claims of the apathy of the Hong Kong people. The social unrest in 1966/67 showed that the people of Hong Kong were not as apathetic as the authorities had claimed. This was followed, in the 1970s, by a period of relative quiet in Hong Kong, and the authorities used this quiet as evidence of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people and as a reason for lack of political reform. Then, during the 1980s, the government suddenly decided, in the light of negotiations with China, that the political complexion of Hong Kong should be reformed, despite ignoring all calls in the past for such reform.

My thesis will prove, through an analysis of official government documents and newspaper sources, that rather than being politically apathetic, the people of Hong Kong were denied opportunities for direct political expression by the colonial government; that the colonial government discouraged the growth of a Hong Kong national identity or consciousness; that the colonial government attempted to foster political apathy by various means such as legislation, by enforcing the paternalistic political set-up and eventually by making some social welfare reforms and increased social spending. In addition this thesis will argue that the colonial government exploited the myth of political apathy using all available resources within

³ Aline K. Wong, 'Political Apathy and the Political System in Hong Kong', *United College Journal*, 8(1970-71), p.1.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.1.

their power to maintain the status quo of a benevolent autocracy. Because I do not read Chinese this thesis is primarily concerned with examining the colonial government's attempt to avoid reform which might question their autocratic control. I am primarily concerned to show how the colonial government created or expanded the notion of political apathy of the majority of Hong Kong's populace. Rather than attempt to analyse the overall political views of the population I have selected specific instances or events which counter-act or undermine or disprove the notion of political apathy.

Before outlining the chapters of this thesis there is a need to clarify the technical terms dealt with in this thesis, namely 'political' and 'apathy'. The dictionary definitions are as follows:

Apathy: Insensibility to suffering; indifference; mental indolence.

Political: Of the State or its government; of public affairs; of politics; (of person) engaged in civil administration.⁵

In this thesis these terms will be used according to their dictionary meanings. I will interpret acts that displayed concern for public affairs as political acts. All public issues in Hong Kong become political issues by virtue of the colonial government's paternalistic nature and its efforts to dissipate any challenge to the status quo. The Hong Kong authorities were able to perpetuate the myth of political apathy among the Hong Kong populace by confining their definition of political activity to an extreme one, that is, an attempt to overthrow the government. An absence of such extreme activity was taken as an indication of political indifference. I will show that the people of Hong Kong were not insensible to suffering, nor were they socially or politically indifferent or mentally indolent. Many had an interest in government but were unable to participate, and many were deeply concerned with public affairs and civil administration.

Chapter One will provide a background to the main argument. It will firstly examine the structure of the Hong Kong Government showing how its autocratic design was unsympathetic to representative government during the time frame of this thesis. Secondly, an examination of the failed attempt at constitutional reform by the Governor Sir Mark Young in the late 1940s and early 1950s, will show how and why the myth of political apathy arose. Finally, I will examine the construction and exploitation of the myth

⁵*The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary* (Oxford, 2nd ed, 1976), pp.32 & 653.

of political apathy by the government and interested parties and its widespread acceptance both in Hong Kong and throughout the world.

Chapter Two will examine the 1966 Kowloon riots and the 1967 riots in support of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The 1966 riots, sparked off by an increase in ferry fare prices, pointed to the fact that there was a growing number of Hong Kong people who were dissatisfied with the paternalistic colonial government. A commission of inquiry into the 1966 riots developed a theory of a communication gap between the government and the people to explain the riots. It was not considered that government attitudes and policies may have been to blame. The 1967 riots in support of the Cultural Revolution, being ostensibly an issue of mainland politics, were not considered by the authorities as a major threat to their regime. The colonial authorities used the 1967 riots to say that the only political activity in the colony was inspired by external politics, thereby reinforcing their claim that the people of Hong Kong had no desire to be involved in the politics of the colony. But the 1966 and 1967 riots revealed the potential for political activism that existed in the colony.

Chapter Three will focus upon developments in the later years of the governorship of Sir David Trench, from 1966 to 1971, which showed a response to previous government neglect. Keeping in line with a *laissez faire* policy, social intervention by the government was virtually non-existent, apart from emergency relief and public housing. It was believed that "... Hong Kong [was] a British colony which exist[ed] primarily to serve the interests of merchants and industrialists".⁶ The 1966 Kowloon riots and the 1967 riots in support of the Cultural Revolution in Hong Kong can be seen as an attempt to force the government to admit to public dissatisfaction. The government response was to blame this dissatisfaction on a communication gap between the government and the public. The government stated that the public were not well enough aware of what government was doing for them and this was why there was a gap. This chapter argues however, that the gap was caused more by government unwillingness to listen to the public, a paternalistic style of government from the top down. Despite government rhetoric in support of closing the gap, reforms were superficial, and only designed to placate the public. The government did not address the most significant issue of the gap; that the people wanted more voice in the running

⁶ C.P. Lo, *Hong Kong* (London, 1992), p.173.

of the colony. Once life returned to normal after the major riots, calls for more substantial social and political reforms continued among the populace.

Chapter Four focuses on the early years of the governorship of Murray MacLehose, 1972 to 1976. It was this period that saw a fundamental redirection of government policy towards social issues. During this period political activity took the form of public pressure on the government to act in areas of social reform. Public pressure made the political issue of social reform the aim of the new administration. But I will argue that the government only succumbed to this public pressure in order to maintain the status quo, and only when it was absolutely essential. These reforms did not stem from any moral obligation felt by the government towards the people; they were designed only to quell calls for political reform. These reforms were, in relation to Hong Kong's past, quite significant, but compared with other industrial nations they were very minor. Also, during this period, the Hong Kong administration faced a great crisis of legitimacy when the government was forced to admit that corruption was rife throughout the colony and, in particular, in the police force. Public pressure forced the government to take some action with the setting up of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). Corruption became a political issue for the government, and the people of Hong Kong were certainly not indifferent to it, or accepting of the problem.

Chapter Five will focus upon the later years of Murray MacLehose's governorship, 1977 to 1982. This period began with another political crisis for the Hong Kong administration. The strength of numbers in the Hong Kong police force, plus its wide ranging powers, such as arbitrary stop and search, had been an effective deterrent to any overt display of dissatisfaction with the colonial government. Exposed by the ICAC as corrupt in epidemic proportions, the rank and file of the police force in 1977 staged massive protests against the ICAC, in what amounted to a near mutiny against the authorities. The Governor, acting unilaterally, granted an amnesty for corruption exposed before 1977, though only a few weeks previously he had reaffirmed the government's commitment to eradicating corruption. The placation of this substantial political power bloc was demonstrative of the lengths to which the government would go to maintain the autocratic status quo. It also reaffirmed government reliance upon, and cooption of, various power blocs, such as the police force, to maintain their legitimacy and the

political stability of the colony. This chapter will also demonstrate that social reforms continued but the infamous gap between public and government remained and that political reforms were insubstantial.

Chapter Six concerns the period of the governorship of Sir Edward Youde, and the period of Sino-British negotiations on the future status of Hong Kong, from 1982 to the first elections to the Legislative Council in 1985. This period marked the beginnings of political change in Hong Kong. Prior to this period the colonial government had consistently stated that constitutional reforms for the colony were impossible because the government of communist China would never allow them, but under Sir Edward the colonial government began moves toward a more representative (albeit minimal) government, with the full knowledge that Hong Kong would return to China in 1997. This move had nothing to do with local calls for constitutional reform (which the colonial government had always ignored); it was a face saving measure by the British Government to demonstrate to the world that they were not merely abandoning the people of Hong Kong to an unknown future with communist China. The elections to the Legislative Council represented the first moves towards representative government in Hong Kong, but it was a situation of too little too late. This chapter will argue that such reforms were never intended to be anything other than window dressing for public consumption.

The conclusion of this thesis can be summed up as follows; the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic. They were denied any chance to participate directly in the administration of the colony by a colonial government determined to maintain the status quo of a benevolent autocracy. Arguments that claimed that the people of Hong Kong must be politically apathetic because they have not rebelled against the government, despite the anathema of colonial rule, were misguided. The essential way of life in Hong Kong was not a cause of major dissatisfaction for the Hong Kong people, that is, the system was not so oppressive as to create militant opposition. Denied the opportunity to participate politically, the people of Hong Kong therefore found other ways to influence the government, especially the use of pressure to gain social reforms. This tactic was successful because the colonial government was willing to use social reform as a means to quell calls for political reform.

The gap between government and the people was never successfully closed because the government stubbornly refused to see that the main cause of this gap was their ignorance of public views and their refusal to respond until issues reached crisis level. Despite the colonial government's claim to possess great communications networks, this ignorance was the reality. Government attempts to close the gap by making clearer to the people what they were doing failed because it was not a two-way process. They did not seriously consider the public's views, and when these views were sought they were often ignored. The few attempts to solicit public opinion were only a superficial attempt to show that the administration was ruling by consensus.

Eventually (a catch phrase concerning any type of reform in Hong Kong) calls for constitutional reform that had always been ignored were heeded in 1985. But again this response was not an act of moral obligation on the part of the Hong Kong Government but an attempt by the British Government to save face in the international arena. The people of Hong Kong were never politically apathetic, but were successfully prevented by the colonial government from being able to participate in the government of the colony. They consequently found other outlets for political expression such as putting pressure on the government for social reform or subtle resistance to government policies.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSTRUCTION OF THE MYTH

The belief that the people of Hong Kong are politically apathetic has become a historical truism rarely questioned by researchers of Hong Kong society. This belief dates back to the 1940s, at which time the Governor, Sir Mark Young, put forward plans for constitutional reform. These reforms would have led to eventual self-government in the colony. In the early 1950s the next Governor, Sir Alexander Grantham, with the support of the Unofficials¹ on the Legislative Council (Legco), rejected the Young Plan and all other proposals for reform; the resultant situation was maintenance of the status quo of autocratic rule. The fact that the Unofficials had supported Grantham, and the lack of public influence over the government led to the belief that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic and did not desire any form of representative government. This belief remained in people's minds for the entire period covered by this thesis, and is still believed even today in the 1990s. This was due, in great part, to clever governmental exploitation of the myth of political apathy.

As Peter Slinn has observed of the Hong Kong Government:

Until October, 1985, there was no elected element in the central government and legislature of the colony of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a classic model of old-style colonial government; executive power is vested in the London-appointed Governor, advised by (but not obliged to take the advice of) an *executive council* made up of nominated 'official' and 'unofficial' members; legislative power is vested locally in a *legislative council*, presided over by the Governor, with a power vested in London to 'disallow' any ordinance passed. Until October, 1985, the legislative council ('Legco') consisted wholly of nominated official and unofficial members.²

This is an apt and simple explanation of the government of Hong Kong. It succinctly describes what was, during the time frame of this thesis, a

¹ Unofficial members of the Legislative Council were non-civil servant appointees of the Governor.

² Peter Slinn, 'The Hong Kong Settlement: A Preliminary Assessment', *International Relations*, 9:1(1987), p.8.

colonial anachronism. The government of Hong Kong remained, as it had since the nineteenth century, an example of classic colonial-style rule. Meetings of the Executive Council (Exco) were held behind closed doors and information from these meetings was not publicly available. It was here that policy was ultimately decided before being presented to the Legco. All members of the Legco were nominated by the Governor and were therefore by implication supporters of the status quo. The Unofficials (usually wealthy businessmen and Chinese elite) did not function as an opposition and were by no stretch of the imagination representative of the Hong Kong population. They were generally sympathetic to government policies which in turn enabled them to prosper. Business interests were entrenched in the government of Hong Kong. It must be remembered in this respect that Hong Kong was founded as a trading colony; as one Unofficial Legislative Councillor put it: "Hong Kong exists of trade, by trade and for trade".³

The closest one can come to the workings of the colonial government is through an examination of the official reports of the Legislative Council, but these do not make for exciting reading in comparison to, for example, debates in the British House of Commons. There were no debates as such in the Legislative Council. Governor Murray MacLehose stated at a Legislative Council meeting in 1975: "It is indeed not the tradition that Hong Kong should be governed by debate, or that there should be debate and opposition for debate and opposition's sake".⁴ Meetings of this council consisted of the Governor making a policy speech at the beginning of each session, followed by an address of thanks to the Governor, first by the Unofficials, then the Officials.⁵ These were prewritten speeches that generally praised the government. The same pattern emerged with the presentation of Bills. Each member made a speech giving their views and ended with the standard phrase "I support the motion". With few exceptions, it is difficult to find any motions opposed by the Unofficials at this time. The only occasion on which all the Unofficials opposed a motion in the period under discussion was in 1983 when considering a motion made to amend the wording of an Education Commission Report.⁶ The Unofficials were in any case in a minority in

³ Mr Tien, *Hong Kong Hansard. Reports of the Sittings of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong*, 23 October 1975, Session 1975/76 (1 October 1975 - 4 August 1976), p.132.

⁴ *ibid.*, 8 October 1975, Session 1975/76, p.44.

⁵ Officials of the Legco were civil servant appointees.

⁶ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 13 July 1983, Session 1982/83 (6 October 1982 - 10 August 1983), pp.1121-1127.

government. The Officials had, in theory, the ability to outvote them on any matter.

No part of the government had a mandate from the people of Hong Kong. The government was in no way democratic or even representative of the majority of the Hong Kong population, which was 98 per cent Chinese. "The only concession to democracy [was] the Urban Council, a body mainly concerned with sewage and public health. Half of its members [were] elected on a restricted franchise".⁷ This franchise was for the major part of the period 1966 to 1985 limited to 300,000 people (in a population of over four million) with certain complicated educational and professional qualifications. The lack of participation in voting or even registering for the Urban Council elections has time and again been used to validate the statement that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic, and justify the lack of constitutional reform. Yet the majority of the population were disenfranchised, therefore having no right to vote. Government, because of this fact, attempted to maintain its legitimacy through the claim of governing by consensus. This was claimed to be achieved by consultation with the people through such channels as the City District Officers Scheme (CDO) and Umelco (Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Council Office). These schemes were set up to bridge the gap between the government and the people, but these schemes were arguably unsuccessful.⁸ Government, while professing to be sensitive to public opinion continued to ultimately represent the business elite.

The Hong Kong Government was a bureaucratic entity, in which the majority of Hong Kong people had little chance of participating. The outdated autocratic colonial system of government was unsympathetic to any kind of constitutional reform or moves towards a more representative system of government. 'Theirs was a the system works, the people have all they need, there is no need for change mentality. The Hong Kong Government was an entity unto itself, answerable to no one except the British parliament, who generally took little interest in Hong Kong's affairs. Dominated by an expatriate elite and Chinese business or social elite, as Unofficial Councillor, Mr Wong observed: "Hong Kong is a paternalistic

⁷ N.J. Miners, 'Hong Kong: A Case Study in Political Stability', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 13(1975), p.27.

⁸ See Lau Siu-kai, 'The Government, Intermediate Organizations, and Grass-Roots Politics in Hong Kong', *Asian Survey*, 21:8(1981), pp.876-879.

society".⁹ This was a reference to the traditional belief that Hong Kong people followed a Confucian philosophy (which will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter) and it was upon this premise that the Hong Kong Government saw the legitimacy of its antiquated colonial governing style; the people wanted a paternalistic government not a representative one. By controlling access to government the colonial authorities were able to surrounded themselves with Legislative Councillors who benefited from the status quo and were unlikely to rock the boat.

Britain, and other major colonial nations, have, since the end of World War Two, guided their colonies on the road to self-government and independence. As stated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

The cardinal principle of British colonial policy is that dependent territories shall be guided to responsible self-government within the commonwealth in conditions that ensure to the people concerned both a fair standard of living and freedom from oppression from any quarter. As part of that policy it is the aim to work as rapidly as circumstances permit towards the establishment of strong central governments, democratically constituted, to which eventual responsibility can be transferred gladly and with confidence.¹⁰

Hong Kong was an exception to this rule. There was never any intention on the part of the British or Hong Kong Government's to apply this policy to Hong Kong. The colony was destined to remain in a state of political limbo, the trappings of democracy (for example freedom of speech, limited elections and the rule of law) without representative government, a contradiction in terms. Stability and prosperity were the catch-phrases of the Hong Kong elite; democracy or representative government, by contrast, represented to them instability and a corresponding loss of revenue. This belief led the government of Hong Kong, and those who supported the colonial regime, to reject any notion of substantial constitutional reform that would have reduced their power. In this process interested parties successfully created and perpetuated the myth of apathy about the people of Hong Kong.

⁹ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 November 1972, Session 1972/73 (1 October 1972 - 30 September 1973), p.59.

¹⁰ Cmnd. 7709, British Parliamentary Report, *British Dependencies in the Far East 1945-1949*, p.51.

At the end of World War Two, with a Labour Government in office in Britain which supported a decolonisation policy, there was pressure for constitutional reform in Hong Kong. Sir Mark Young, restored as Hong Kong's Governor at the end of the Japanese occupation, was in favour of such reforms. He formulated a plan, known as the Young Plan, to give Hong Kong a more representative government, which would have eventually led to self-government. It was a favourable time to consider reform in light of China's preoccupation with its civil war between the communists and the nationalists. In this congenial atmosphere plans for constitutional reform in Hong Kong were supported by the British Government.

On 24 July 1947 ... the Hong Kong government published Creech-Jones' approval in principle of Young's reform proposals The Hong Kong government was also given the express authority to proceed with detailed preparations in order to give effect to the Young Plan.¹¹

These plans though were quickly shelved and eventually abandoned. The Young Plan was doomed from the start. The Unofficials on the Legislative Council were, as they continued to be, against any constitutional reform that might harm the monopoly of the business community in government. "Entrenched business interests had ... little taste for power-sharing".¹²

Sir Mark Young, after a very brief period of governorship, was replaced as Governor in late 1947 by Sir Alexander Grantham. Grantham, like the Unofficials, was against reforming the government of Hong Kong and effectively prevented the implementation of the Young Plan.

He believed that the British would have to return the whole colony to China when the lease for the New Territories expired in 1997, and that the form of government most appropriate in the existing circumstances was a 'benevolent autocracy' - that is, the particular version of the Crown colony system then existing in the territory.¹³

This was the rationale followed by future Governors of the colony when faced with the question of constitutional reform in Hong Kong. The political complexion of Hong Kong was to reflect the British Government's desire to

¹¹ Steve Yui-Sang Tsang, *Democracy Shelved. Great Britain, China, and Attempts at Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong, 1945-1952* (Oxford, 1988), pp.46-47.

¹² Ian Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* (London, 1989), p.80.

¹³ Tsang, p.187.

placate China. The British Foreign Office had successfully persuaded the British parliament that relations with China were far more important than constitutional reform in Hong Kong and on 26 May 1949 Cabinet concluded that:

Policy must take account of the fact that Hong Kong was valuable to us mainly as a centre of trade In the long term, if a strong Communist Government established itself in control over the whole of China, it would be impossible for us to maintain Hong Kong as a trading centre unless that Government acquiesced in our continuance there. These considerations seemed to suggest that the aim of our policy should be to find a basis on which a Communist Government of China could acquiesce in our remaining in Hong Kong.¹⁴

Essentially this meant the preservation of the political status quo, which would benefit Britain in terms of her relationship with China and China in terms of utilising Hong Kong as a gateway to the world and for trade. The expiry date of the New Territories lease was an important consideration in the formulating of policy concerning Hong Kong. The British Government was, even at this time, fully aware that Hong Kong would be returned to China in 1997.

The lease of the new territories expires in 1997. It does not seem likely that any Chinese Government will be prepared to renew [the] lease. Without these territories Hong Kong would be untenable and it is therefore probable that before 1997 [the] United Kingdom Government of the day will have to consider [the] status of Hong Kong.¹⁵

Preservation of the status quo was of the utmost importance. The British, in light of this fact, reneged on their promise of constitutional reform for Hong Kong. The Governor's and the Unofficials' lack of support, and British conciliation towards China, prompted the rejection of all plans for Hong Kong's constitutional reform by the early 1950s. A show case of reform was made in the Urban Council scheme of 1952 but as Steve Tsang states: "... the Urban Council scheme was of little real significance Despite the Hong

¹⁴ CAB 128/15, CM 38(49)3, Cabinet, conclusions on defence of Hong Kong, 26 May 1949, in *The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1952. Part II, Economics and International Relations* (ed) Ronald Hyam (London, 1992), p.392.

¹⁵ CO 537/4805, no 86B, Commonwealth Relations Office to UK high commissioners, telegram, 7 September 1949, in *ibid.*, p.402.

Kong government's claim that the changes introduced in 1952 represented constitutional advance, they were in fact little more than administrative changes ...".¹⁶ The colony was destined to remain politically frozen.

The British Government could control the political evolution of the colony and proceeded to do so in such a way that the colony's government remained, until 1985, as it had since the nineteenth century. In 1966 Mr Frederick Lee, Secretary of State for the Colonies said, on the question of constitutional reform for Hong Kong, "There are obvious limitations on Constitutional development",¹⁷ and "... progress towards self-government or independence is not possible, for reasons which are generally understood in the Colony".¹⁸ The generally understood reason reiterated by the British Government was that communist China would not tolerate any move toward representative government in Hong Kong and that any attempt at reform would almost certainly result in the communists sending troops into Hong Kong and taking the colony by force. The colonial government exploited this belief in an effort to discourage political activity by the people of Hong Kong, especially after the 1967 riots in support of the Cultural Revolution.

The British Government was using two arguments to support the lack of constitutional reform in Hong Kong; that of fear of Chinese interference and that of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people. The British Government treated these two issues as mutually exclusive, being more interested in its relationship with China than with the political desires of the Hong Kong people. While it is arguable whether the Chinese would have interfered in Hong Kong in the light of constitutional reform, it was reason enough to discourage the Hong Kong people from active political agitation. Proponents of the status quo in Hong Kong did not show any recognition of the contradiction these two arguments entailed. On the one hand supporters of the status quo said that the people of Hong Kong feared the Chinese communists and had for this reason fled China, which implied that these people were not apathetic. On the other hand they were saying that the people of Hong Kong were apathetic. Commentators and analysts of the time endorsed these arguments which led to the widespread acceptance and dissemination of the myth of apathy, as shown below.

¹⁶ Tsang, p.186.

¹⁷ *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 30 June 1966, Volume 730, 1966, p.2161.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 8 November 1966, Volume 735, 1966, p.1140.

The belief in the myth of apathy can be traced back to the abandonment of the Young Plan in early 1950. As Aline Wong observes: "The failure of the Young Plan marked the beginning of the popular belief, especially among Government officials, that the Hong Kong people are politically apathetic and do not want self-rule".¹⁹ Statements such as the following show that exploitation of this belief has affected the view of writers on Hong Kong:

From the lack of any expression of desire for independent self-government, one must conclude that there is a general acceptance of the Government's thesis that independence would not be permitted by Peking [sic] and that steps to achieve it would bring about a communist takeover the desire for independence, is completely lacking in Hong Kong.²⁰

As Peter Harris states: "... the British see the legitimacy of their stand in Hong Kong as deriving from the absence of controversy regarding popular demand for political change [The] British Government is committed to 'frozen politics' as far as Hong Kong is concerned".²¹ Anything that could damage this 'legitimacy' was dangerous for the Hong Kong Government; it was therefore in their interests to play down any type of political activity. Sidney Verba et al. make a significant observation that is pertinent to the argument here: "... institutions can dominate participation negatively by controlling and limiting access to channels of activity".²² This is what the Hong Kong Government sought to do through the exploitation of the myth of political apathy.

This myth of political apathy was able to gain a strong hold because of Westernised stereotyping of the Chinese value system. That the majority of Chinese people followed traditional Confucian values was, again, an unquestioned assumption. A construct developed by Western analysts and political commentators portrayed the Chinese as hard-working (a long used excuse for the lack of labour reforms in Hong Kong), familial (they cared only about themselves and their family, that is they were socially apathetic), and

¹⁹ Aline Wong, p.6.

²⁰ Joe England & John Rear, *Chinese Labour Under British Rule. A Critical Study of Labour Relations and Law in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1975), p.4.

²¹ Peter Harris, 'Policy Process and Policy Formation in Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong: Dilemmas of Growth* (eds) Leung Chi-keung, J.W. Cushman & Wang Gungwa (Canberra, 1980), p.33.

²² Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie & Kim Jae-on, *Participation and Political Equality: A Five Nation Comparison* (Cambridge, 1978), p.82.

politically passive, in that they saw government as a father figure who made important decisions for them and looked after them (they therefore had no desire to take any part in government). Much of the literature about Hong Kong conforms to this traditional argument; for example: "The attitude of the Hong Kong Chinese has been perhaps to let sleeping dogs lie; but it is possible that the whole set-up in fact conforms, if accidentally, to certain historical Chinese ideals";²³ "Anti-political attitudes may also stem from a Confucian view of society as a naturally harmonious whole in which all classes and groups know their place and accept without argument the decisions of their betters".²⁴ The government of Hong Kong was able to exploit this view of Confucianism to justify its lack of constitutional reform within the colony.

Westerners interpreted the idea of Confucianism in such a way as to construct the Chinese people as an other, so as to attribute to them traits and ideals that Westerners saw the Chinese as having. Whether this construction had elements of reality or not was immaterial as its internalisation in Western thought rendered the stereotype difficult to destroy. It was the same with the myth of political apathy, which arose from this construction of Confucianism:

The belief that the Chinese people are by tradition politically indifferent does not stand on firm ground either when the political philosophy as embodied in the Chinese classics is carefully examined an analysis of the political behaviour of the Chinese in Hong Kong cannot rely on political presuppositions, nor on elitist cultural ideals, but must take into account the actual context within which political activity takes place.²⁵

The Chinese people are oftentimes characterized as politically apathetic, and their political passivity is frequently adduced to explain political stability in Hong Kong Apathy has been commonly treated as an inherent trait in the Chinese national character, and seldom is it considered to be a psychological and behavioural manifestation contingent upon structural conditions.²⁶

²³ H.A Turner & Patricia Fosh, *The Last Colony, But Whose? A Study of the Labour Movement, Labour Market, and Labour Relations in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, 1980), p.8.

²⁴ Norman Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Oxford, 3rd ed, 1981), p.253.

²⁵ Aline Wong, p.2.

²⁶ Lau Siu-kai, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1982), pp.13-14.

That these statements were written 10 years apart (the first in 1970/71 and the second in 1982) demonstrates the strength of the Westernised view of Chinese society. They are both fundamentally arguing the same point which can only lead to the conclusion that these views have largely been ignored by proponents of the Westernised view of Chinese society. But while these writers reject the notion of inherent apathy in the Chinese culture, they continue to expound a belief in the apathy of the Hong Kong people. This is possibly due to an acceptance of the argument that the Hong Kong people have shown no militant desire to overthrow the colonial regime, but more probably because they see the lack of participatory channels as *leading* to apathy.

One factor given as proof of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people was the lack of militant opposition to the colonial government.

In the last thirty years most countries in East and South-East Asia have suffered major political upheavals. Regimes have been overthrown and constitutions rewritten following defeat in war, the withdrawal of colonial powers, communist revolutions or military *coups d'état*. Throughout all these convulsions Hong Kong has continued to run its affairs in accordance with a constitution which is basically and formally the same as it was in the nineteenth century.²⁷

The above statement implies that because the Hong Kong people had not rebelled against the regime, they were happy with the status quo. This lack of rebellion provided the colonial government with a sense of legitimacy. BUT to infer that the people of Hong Kong did not want more representative government because they had not aggressively pursued such an aim was a tenuous supposition to make. It would be more pertinent to imply that the colonial government of Hong Kong was able to maintain stability because, in general, the regime was not so oppressive as to require militant opposition as had happened in other Asian nations. This did not imply apathy but merely pointed out that the colonial government was successful in its policy of keeping the population politically acquiescent.

There were many other factors reported by the government and writers at large to explain that, and reinforce the apparent fact that, the people of

²⁷ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.xv.

Hong Kong were politically apathetic. Another of these was that the Hong Kong people were a refugee population. They had escaped communist China to pursue a better life in Hong Kong. If these refugees were apathetic, with all that this entails, surely they would never have left China. While sections of the older population of Hong Kong who fled China during the civil war and after the communist takeover might not have desired any active participation in the governing of Hong Kong, and might have been content with the stability the system gave, this did not imply apathy. Those who chose colonial rule in preference to communist rule would have been reluctant to stage militant opposition for fear of deportation. For the older generation it could have been a question of the lesser of two evils; a choice emphasised by the colonial government's exploitation of the fear of communism.

The colonial government has exploited this supposed fear of communist China among the people of Hong Kong. "They are constantly being reminded that their discontent will give the communists a cause for taking over Hong Kong or that deportation will meet their fate if they make any political move against the present regime".²⁸ Other writers have also observed this fear, for example Norman Miners states:

There is little obvious enthusiasm for reabsorption into the motherland for the present apparently most prefer to endure the British devil that they know rather than run the risk that any attempt at political agitation might unintentionally put an end to the colony's separate existence.²⁹

The colonial authorities manipulated this fear of communist China to discourage political opposition while at the same time colonial government policy was always attuned to the preferences of Beijing for a politically quiescent Hong Kong.

The supposed communist phobia of the Hong Kong people appears however to be exaggerated. As Lau Siu-kai has observed: "... the hostility of the Hong Kong Chinese towards the communist Chinese government seems to have been overstated the Hong Kong Chinese are not as antagonistic to

²⁸ Fung Yee-wang, 'Some Contributory Factors to Student Movements in Hong Kong', *Asia Quarterly*, 4(1973), p292.

²⁹ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.42.

the Communist regime as has been believed to be the case".³⁰ Once again the British have been able to perpetuate a myth that a fear of communism has led the Hong Kong people to prefer colonial rule. This was of course an interesting anomaly in Britain's stand on the Hong Kong issue of 1997. Having repeatedly stated that the people of Hong Kong feared communist China and preferred colonial rule, they were quite willing to see these same people returned to communist China in 1997. The British had since the end of World War Two realised that Hong Kong would eventually return to China. By playing on the fears of communism the colonial authorities were attempting to reinforce their own legitimacy rather than professing a moral commitment to their colonial subjects. They have been able to overcome the anomaly in their stand by reiterating the myth of apathy. The common belief was that the people of Hong Kong knew it was futile to resist reabsorption into China and have therefore accepted their fate. The fact that they had little choice is neatly overlooked.

The people of Hong Kong had little choice when it came to deciding their fate. "It is sometimes argued that Hong Kong is a democracy in the sense that government seeks the good of the people and attempts to maximize popular consent for its policies".³¹ If we understand democracy as the right to participate in government by voting, this was simply not true. As Verba et al. observe:

A policy that limited the amount of political knowledge a citizen could acquire or that restricted the right of the individual to be as convincing and articulate as possible in expressing his or her preferences to a political leader would hardly be consistent with democratic rights.³²

This was certainly the way in which Hong Kong was governed. The Hong Kong people had no say in the running of the colony, except for a few consultation networks that were of little practical value. Consultation does not equal democracy no matter how virtuous and efficient the government is. By equating consultation with democracy the Hong Kong authorities were again reinforcing the myth of apathy. The rationale behind this was that the

³⁰ Lau, *Society and Politics*, p.11-12.

³¹ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.251.

³² Verba, p.10.

people of Hong Kong were content to be part of the consultative process; they had no desire to participate in government.

The belief that the Hong Kong people had no desire to participate in the running of the colony was ostensibly reinforced by the low voter registration and voter turnouts to the Urban Council elections. The government constantly referred to these low figures as proof of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people. They stated that if the people wanted a greater say in the running of the colony they would have made the effort to vote at these elections. "The poor voter turnouts are often alluded to as an indicator of the political apathy of the Hong Kong Chinese. But, in view of the political light-weightedness of the Council, it can also be interpreted as the result of eligible voters' shying away from a futile political exercise".³³ I agree with this statement though I would put it more forcefully that this low voter turnout was not apathy or shying away but protest against the system. It must be remembered also that the franchise was extremely limited so the majority of Hong Kong people did not have the right to vote in any case. Only 300,000 people had the right to vote out of a population of about four million, and the property and educational qualifications of these 300,000 could imply they were the least likely group to criticise the government as they were probably the group who benefited most from colonial rule. These were hardly reliable statistics to brand a whole population as politically apathetic.

Voting turnout at Urban Council elections was in fact comparable with voter turnout at similar elections in other countries: "... the [Hong Kong] voter turnout of 39% of registered persons compares favourably with average turnouts of 41% and 41.1% of registered persons for local elections in 157 towns of England and Wales (1956-58) and 45 cities of Los Angeles County (1932-52)".³⁴ These statistics therefore cannot be used as proof that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic. The low voter turnout figures were also used as a reason for the lack of reform in other areas of government. The rationale seemed to be that if the people could not be bothered voting at the Urban Council elections they did not deserve any greater say about the running of the colony. But as Verba et al. observe:

³³ Lau, *Society and Politics*, p.116.

³⁴ Steve Hoadley, 'Difference of Opinion', *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, November 2, 1967, p.251.

... political institutions affect the political involvement of citizens. Universal suffrage and mass election campaigns open participatory opportunities. The existence of such elections - where they represent meaningful contests - leads political parties to try to mobilize citizen activity. The result is both psychological mobilization (people become more aware of and involved in political life) and behavioural mobilization (they take a more active political role).³⁵

Precisely because the Urban Council elections were not a meaningful political contest in that they had no executive power, and were severely restricted in what they were able to do, the people saw no political gains from voting and therefore did not vote. The Urban Council was not a political institution. Accepting Verba's statement as a likely scenario, which when viewed logically it seems to be, then the lack of participation in the Urban Council elections can be explained in this way.

The above factors, lack of militant opposition to the colonial regime, fear of communist China, traditional Confucian values, and lack of participation in Urban Council elections, have all been used to explain the political apathy of the Hong Kong people and the lack of political reform in the colony. These reasons and explanations have been accepted without question. Yet there is a strong argument that these factors did not point to political apathy, political inactivity yes, but apathy no. It was the administrators and wealthy businessmen of the colony who created this myth of apathy to preserve their interests. The fear was that to alter the status quo was to destroy stability and therefore prosperity:

Such is the fear of altering the *status quo* that not merely have there been no further moves towards responsible government, there has been a steadfast refusal to consider even the smallest measure of representative central government. Similarly, any step which might have suggested a more permanent identity for the people of Hong Kong, such as the creation of Hong Kong citizenship, has been rejected ...³⁶

The China factor was given as a reason for this fear, but it was also in British interests to maintain the status quo, by virtue of the fact that they knew Hong Kong would return in its entirety to China in 1997. To allow any

³⁵ Verba, p.21.

³⁶ England, p.9.

form of political participation or national identity could have potentially upset this delicate balance.

From the failure of the Young Plan in the early 1950s up to 1985, the British and Hong Kong Governments consistently rejected any form of constitutional reform for Hong Kong. The colonial regime in Hong Kong remained as it had since the nineteenth century, a benevolent autocracy. Those wishing to preserve the status quo created the myth of apathy about the Hong Kong people to excuse this lack of constitutional reform in the government of the colony. Apathy implies not caring, but the Hong Kong people did care. This was why the colonial authorities had to play on the people's fear of communist China and deter any sort of political activity within the colony. References to a traditional following of Confucian values by the people of Hong Kong were expounded to reinforce the colonial governments lack of reform. All efforts were made to preserve the political status quo, and the myth of apathy was the tool by which the colonial authorities justified their actions to the world. Indicators used to show the apathy of the Hong Kong people, such as the lack of participation at Urban Council elections, were meaningless because they concerned only a tiny percentage of the population. Despite this the myth of apathy gained widespread acceptance throughout the world. Evidence of this supposed apathy was taken at face value rather than being questioned as a tool to preserve colonial hegemony in Hong Kong. As I will show in the following chapters belief in this myth of apathy was unfounded, the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SHATTERING OF COMPLACENCY

The events of 1966 and 1967 shook the colonial government of Hong Kong out of their complacent attitude towards the people over whom they governed. The administration's attitude had been that the people of Hong Kong were an immigrant (or refugee) society with no loyalty to the colony and no desire to take part in its affairs. This was a view accepted by many:

... it is not true that the population is altogether indifferent to politics, yet the myth is widespread amongst Europeans in the Colony. Chinese politics interest almost everyone There is *less* interest in local Hong Kong politics ... because China has no tradition of democratic participation and because the population of Hong Kong, being largely refugee, feels the politics of the homeland to be of overriding importance, dwarfing everything else.¹

The colonial government remained blind to the fact that there was a rising generation of Hong Kong-born people who considered the colony their home and who were not willing to remain silent in the face of elitist government policies. The Kowloon Riots of April 1966 and the riots, demonstrations and violence of May to December 1967 in support of the Chinese Cultural Revolution provided the impetus for the reforming of the colonial state. The consequence of these riots, therefore, marked a milestone in the history of Hong Kong's social and political system of administration.²

The 1966 Kowloon riots were of the utmost importance in determining the future of Hong Kong. The issues raised by these riots were issues that the government of the colony and those who supported it had refused to acknowledge. Because of the riots the government was no longer able to ignore situations hoping they would disappear. They could no longer rely on their own rhetoric that the people of Hong Kong were content with the colonial situation as it stood. If these riots had not occurred it is doubtful

¹ I.C. Jarvie, 'Introduction', in *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition* (ed) I.C. Jarvie with Joseph Agassi (London, 1969), p.xix.

² See Scott, p.81 & Kuan Hsin-chi, 'Political Stability and Change in Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong. Economic, Social and Political Studies in Development* (eds) Lin Tzong-biau, Rance P.L. Lee & Udo-Ernst Simonis (New York, 1979), p.152.

whether the colonial government would have diverted from its traditional course of *laissez faire* and non intervention in the welfare of the inhabitants of Hong Kong. Even the 1967 riots would not have achieved the same impact as the 1966 riots if they had stood alone. The 1966 and 1966 riots are often presented as one issue but they were separate incidents to which the colonial authorities responded individually and differently; the first positively, the second reactionary. The Hong Kong authorities considered the 1967 riots to be a spill over from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and therefore reflecting a Chinese political issue that had little or nothing to do with Hong Kong *per se*. The 1966 riots were, however, ignited by a purely domestic issue. It was this that the authorities had not expected and it was this fact that drew them into response.

The direct cause of the 1966 riots was a recommendation to allow a fare rise for the Star Ferry company. Protest against the fare increases had been going on since the beginning of the year. In January, the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), a local English language newspaper, reported: "Huge Petition Against Fare Increases Mrs Elsie Elliott [a member of the transport advisory committee and the only one to vote against the increase] yesterday presented a petition containing 155,188 signatures to Govt in protest against public transport fare increases".³ Because the price increase was only for first class travel those who supported the fare increase, or saw it as a non-issue in regard to the general population of Hong Kong, who would have travelled on second class fares, could not understand why it had become such an issue. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), only days before the riots, stated: "THE CONTROVERSY over the *Star Ferry's* application for an increase in fares has grown out of all proportion to the issue involved".⁴

The government had not anticipated the increase would provoke social unrest because they had refused to see that there was discontent and that the people were no longer willing to remain silent. The SCMP reported: "Ferry fares seem supremely unimportant. Yet this is what it was all about".⁵ The root cause of the riots was not a rise in ferry fare prices, but the government's unwillingness to seriously consider the views of the public of

³ *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), 13 January 1966, p.6.

⁴ Editorial, 'Realism Needed', *FEER*, 31 March 1966, p.641.

⁵ SCMP, 7 April 1966, p.12.

Hong Kong. As a member of the public observed: "... it is not the amount of increase that matters but what matters is the principle".⁶ The official response to these riots was swift. Riot police used tear gas to control the crowds, a general curfew was instituted and hundreds were arrested.⁷ What stopped the riots which lasted from 6 to 10 April is open to question; possibly a combination of police pressure and general exhaustion on the part of the rioters. Once over the question still remained, for the government, about what had caused the unexpected riots. It was apparently not obvious to the authorities to look to their policies as the root cause.

With the public obviously dissatisfied and colonial authorities in turmoil the Governor, Sir David Trench, called for an inquiry into the riots and their causes. The inquiry directed blame for the riots at all quarters; Mrs Elsie Elliott (an outspoken Urban Councillor and well-known public figure), the Press, and "an irresponsible and hooligan minority".⁸ The riots and the consequent Commission of Inquiry provoked a multitude of letters to the editor and articles in prominent newspapers and serials, for example: "It is not Mrs Elliott alone, or the rioters alone who are responsible for this week's nightmare. The whole of society here has reason to feel some sense of shame ... and not least those who rule", or as one insightful and illuminating letter to the editor of the *SCMP* stated:

What is so depressing about the official postures over the recent disorders are the sanctimonious tones of injured pride; the promise of 'fatherly' investigations; the open threat that the techniques of retribution could be multiplied against public dissent in any of its forms; and, more significantly, the complete lack of any hint that the Government sees, or knows, or even cares about, what is going on in the minds of the common people.

It would be far safer and much more honest were Government to assume (even as a theoretical exercise) that the fault lies within its own doors ... that too much power rests in the hands of too few people - no matter how competent.⁹

Ironically it was a London newspaper, and not a Hong Kong one, that pointed to what lay behind the riots: "The London Times has detected in last week's

⁶ Correspondence to the Editor, *ibid.*, 18 April 1966, p.12.

⁷ See *ibid.*, 6, 7 & 8 April 1966, p.1; *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 10 April 1966, p.1.

⁸ Statement made by the Colonial Secretary at the Commission of Inquiry, *SCMP*, 17 April 1966, p.1.

⁹ Correspondence to the Editor, *ibid.*, 12 April 1966, p.12; 13 April 1966, p.12.

Kowloon riots 'a ground-swell of popular discontent' and it may be right ...".¹⁰ This ground swell of discontent also provided fuel for the communist inspired riots of 1967.

The 1967 riots in support of the Cultural Revolution in China were far more prolonged and violent than those of 1966. These riots, though inspired by mainland Chinese politics, were also a symptom of the feeling of dissatisfaction in Hong Kong. This reinforced the importance of the issues raised by the 1966 riots, but because the 1967 riots were obviously related to mainland politics the colonial government used them as an excuse to tighten public control and shelve any plans for political reform inspired by the 1966 riots (which will be discussed in Chapter Three). These riots were also viewed by the government, whose image had been so tarnished the previous year, as a means of re-emphasising their public support. The violent actions of the 1967 rioters had lost them the sympathy of the majority of the people of Hong Kong and the government made much of this renewed support. The 1966 riots, having damaged the government's image had not been mentioned in the Legislative Council (Legco). But the 1967 riots and the reaffirmation of the administration's legitimacy was proclaimed by Unofficial Legislative Councillors:

At the moment of crisis the people of Hong Kong stood behind you and it was *then* that the true spirit of Hong Kong emerged. By their deeds, the public have given you, Sir, and will continue to give you, a vote of confidence of a kind and an unanimity which is stronger for not being counted in upraised hands and nodding heads The fact remains that Hong Kong is a community and a home of 4 million people who were born here or who have voted with their feet to show their preference for our way of life.¹¹

This was a turn around from the traditional governmental refugee mentality. Now it seemed that the people did see Hong Kong as their community and home, preferring 'our way of life'. This was an ominous statement subtly hinting that the population's support of the government during the 1967 riots implied support for, and contentment with, the political status quo.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 12 April 1966, p.10.

¹¹ Mr Dhun J. Ruttonjee, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 31 May 1967, Session 1967, p.326.

The important issue exposed by both riots was that the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic. Though the administration chose to play this down; "Not unnaturally, neither the government nor the *Report [Kowloon Disturbances 1966 Report of Commission of Inquiry, Hong Kong, 1967]* mentioned or commended this growth of political consciousness";¹² some observers were aware that this was the case. A letter to the editor of the *SCMP* made this clear:

Those who for years have blinded themselves with the view that the people of Hong Kong are not interested in 'politics' will, from henceforth, have to live with their mistake. For we must face the (for some) unpalatable truth that Hongkong seeths [sic] with political feeling; that the evidence for this does not rest in past political feeling in connection with Urban Council elections; but in a form of spontaneous civic protests that is here to stay.¹³

The people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic but they had no way of making their feelings known to those who governed them. There was a general feeling that the government did not care. Social, labour and educational conditions in the colony were deplorable, and the population was politically emasculated. Rioting was the outcome of total frustration; as the Editor of the *FEER* observed: "... in a society denied any form of political maturity, what else could one expect?"¹⁴

Despite the exposure of the government's myth of apathy the belief in the myth persisted. The Commission of Inquiry declared that the 1966 Kowloon riots were not the result of political, economic or social frustration.¹⁵ The commission came up with a theory far more palatable for the government; that there was a gap in communication between the government and the people of the colony. The report of the Commission of Inquiry did not look for deeper underlying issues as a cause of the riots. Blame was put squarely on the people of Hong Kong. The report argued that the riots were the result of the public being misinformed; they had not known the facts of the fare increase and had therefore rioted. The government was a benevolent regime concerned for the welfare of the people of Hong Kong. The people only needed

¹² I.C. Jarvie, 'A Postscript on Riots and the Future of Hong Kong' in *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition*, p.364.

¹³ Correspondence to the Editor, *SCMP*, 13 April 1966, p.12.

¹⁴ Editorial, 'Lifting the Lid', *FEER*, 14 April 1966, p.133.

¹⁵ 'Commission Reports on Kowloon Riots', *SCMP*, 22 February 1967, p.6

to realise this for harmony to be restored.¹⁶ The administration chose to focus on this gap, which became their catch word to explain any dissent among the populace.

The cause of this gap, according to officials, was that the public was not well enough aware of what government was doing for them. This view was shown in a statement by an Unofficial Legislative Councillor:

There has been talk about the gap between the Government and the people and I think it is important that more is done to get through to this young generation. To use an old cliché, Government must not only govern, Government must be seen to govern I feel the time has come when Government should have a professional public relations unit to present its case to the people.¹⁷

There was no statement of the communication going both ways. This again showed the paternalistic attitude of the government. The belief seems to have been that once the people were well informed about all the things the government was doing for them, the gap would rapidly diminish.

There was certainly a lack of knowledge about what the government was doing but this could only account in part for the gap. The fundamental cause of the gap was not that the people were uninformed but that the government was ignorant of public feelings. As Mr Brook Bernacchi, Chairman of the Reform Club and an Urban Councillor, stated at the Commission of Inquiry hearing: "The Government is not sufficiently in touch with the thinking of the man-in-the-street ...".¹⁸ It took such violent means to force the colonial administration to recognise the need to (at least) be seen to take public views into account. Though there was an attempt to realise public views, it was at best half hearted. Government efforts to close the gap could never be successful because they saw the process as essentially a need for a downward flow of information.

The events of 1966 and 1967 foreshadowed a fundamental redirection of colonial government policy. The ground-swell of discontent among the people of Hong Kong, brought to light by the riots of 1966 and 1967, revealed that

¹⁶ See I.C. Jarvie, 'A Postscript', p.364.

¹⁷ Mr G.R. Ross, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 16 March 1967, Session 1967, p173.

¹⁸ *SCMP*, 27 May 1966, p.8.

the traditional hands-off attitude of the Hong Kong Government was no longer sufficient for the maintenance of political stability within the colony. The myth of apathy had been expelled by these events but continued to hold firm in the attitudes of the expatriates and their supporters. To maintain the status quo of the traditional benevolent autocracy within Hong Kong, the government was forced to re-evaluate its policies in favour of a more interventionist approach. The revelation of the gap that existed between the government and the people provided the framework through which the colonial government attempted to reaffirm its legitimacy. Unfortunately the true nature of the gap, that the people of Hong Kong desired to have more voice in the running of the colony, was ignored.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WINDS OF CHANGE ?

The riots of 1966, reinforced by the riots of 1967, raised many issues that were to remain in the limelight for years to come. These issues were: the demand for elected representatives to the Legislative Council (Legco); demand for a reformed local government; the gap between the government and the people; the demand for more locals (as opposed to expatriates) in the civil service; the demand for Chinese (Cantonese) to be a joint official language; the issue of corruption, especially within the police force; the need for labour, educational and general social reforms; and the lack of a sense of belonging to a Hong Kong community felt by many of the Hong Kong Chinese. It was these issues that the colonial government was forced to address, and that continued to be a source of dissatisfaction among the population of Hong Kong.

The colonial system of government had long been criticised by people both in Hong Kong and Britain as evidenced by statements such as the following: "Mr Alastair Hetherington, Editor of the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, described Hongkong's present system of government as 'an anachronism' and advocated the introduction of representative government during an interview yesterday".¹ Supporters of the political status quo of a benevolent autocracy confused the issue of constitutional reform by equating the call for more representative government with a call for self-government that would lead to independence.² Yet this was not what reformers were advocating. As Mr Lawrence Leong, a Hong Kong barrister stated: "I would put as our first and most urgent objective the introduction of some system of representative government this demand has nothing to do with a demand for political change towards independence. I am talking about an internal change in the method of ruling the Colony".³

¹ *SCMP*, 6 May 1967, p.1. A letter to the editor of *SCMP* stated: "It seems to me that Government should attempt to show the people of Hongkong that it feels some responsibility to them by establishing a broad franchise and political bodies which have some power", Correspondence to the Editor, *SCMP*, 17 September 1966, p.12. Also see *SCMP*, 28 October 1967, p.10; 11 November 1967, p.11.

² For example see Editorial, *ibid.*, 23 March 1967, p.14.

³ 'An Open Letter', *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 28 August 1966, p.4. Also see *SCMP*, 3 November 1967, pp.6-7.

Both the British and the Hong Kong Governments rejected the call for constitutional reform in the colony. Supporters of the political status quo continually referred to the lack of demand for constitutional reform implying that the majority of the population was content with the governing of the colony.⁴ "Sir George Sinclair, an Opposition Conservative, said there was no overwhelming demand for an elected council",⁵ but as one writer replied: "If 'Three Cheers' [a correspondent to the *SCMP*] does not know there is a rising popular demand for elected representatives in the Legislative Council, it is only too obvious that he is out of touch with the non-English speaking community".⁶ The colonial government consistently rejected out of hand calls for elected representation on the Legco. The purported apathy of the Hong Kong people, though, was not the reason for this rejection, as was shown in a statement by The Minister of State for Commonwealth Affairs, in 1967: "Because of Hong Kong's particular relationship with China, it would not be possible to think of the normal self-government and not possible therefore, to consider an elected Legislative Council".⁷ The myth of apathy merely reinforced this belief. The statement by an Unofficial Member of Legco that "... we do not want politics of any kind ...",⁸ demonstrated the attitude of the colonial government and its supporters.

It was not apathy but the political set up that discouraged any overt display of support for constitutional reform. The colonial authorities had wide ranging powers to deter political activity among the populace of Hong Kong such as detention and deportation. This was for many people in Hong Kong who had fled China a very persuasive deterrent to voicing a desire for greater participation in the governing of the colony.⁹ The colonial government was well aware that their legitimacy was tenuous at best. They were also aware, despite protestations to the contrary, of the very real political consciousness of the people of Hong Kong. Hong Kong was therefore a highly authoritarian state. The size of the police force, one of the largest in the world per capita, attested to the authoritarian nature of the regime. "It [the police force] has two major roles. The first is law enforcement in the

⁴ For example see *SCMP*, 9 June 1966, p.12; 22 February 1967, p.12; 13 September 1966, p.12.

⁵ *ibid.*, 23 March 1967, p.11.

⁶ Correspondence to the Editor, *ibid.*, 18 February 1966, p.10; 21 February 1967, p.12.

⁷ *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, 27 February 1967, Volume 742, 1967, p.58. Also see Frank Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* (London, 1993), p.464-465.

⁸ Mr F.S. Li, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 28 June 1967, Session 1967, p.354.

⁹ See Correspondence to the Editor, *SCMP*, 7 January 1966, p.12.

usual sense, but allied to this is the task of political control".¹⁰ As I.C. Jarvie observed: "Government ambivalence may be indicated by the way they combine a bland front with careful training of the police for riot duty".¹¹ The population was not trusted by the administration, who reinforced their legitimacy by a (subtle) show of strength.

Government and police controls became even more stringent after the 1967 riots. As had been foreseen in 1966, the government used the excuse of hooliganism, to enact stricter legislation on public activities. Civil liberties in Hong Kong were already severely limited. A *Public Order Ordinance*¹² legislated in 1967 made gatherings of three or more people in a public place, without police permission, an unlawful assembly (this legislation was not amended until 1981).¹³ John Rear, in a *FEER* article observed:

... the wide definition of an intimidating assembly means that any unlawful assembly will always be an intimidating assembly It is a particularly unpleasant feature of the Ordinance that any unlicensed meeting automatically becomes an unlawful assembly (and the participants without further ado liable to 5 years imprisonment) without the prosecution having to show that any breach of the peace was a possible result this is an oppressive and unjust piece of legislation.¹⁴

This legislation was ultimately (and successfully) designed to circumvent any attempt to disturb the status quo. The cooperation of the people in support of such ordinances was important to the maintenance of the status quo and the government attempted to co-opt the masses, encouraging their support by playing on their fears. A statement by the Colonial Secretary evidenced this co-option:

As I see it we could and should have on our side millions of pairs of eyes, alert and vigilant, all of us watching as we go about our daily occasions for any evidence that could lead to the apprehension of the wicked men who believe that senseless violence can intimidate us. Vigilance in the streets, in the

¹⁰ S.N.G. Davies, 'One Brand of Politics Rekindled', *Hong Kong Law Journal*, 7:1(1977), p.57.

¹¹ Jarvie, 'A Postscript', p.365.

¹² See 'Public Order Bill 1967', *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 November 1967, Session 1967, pp.438-445 & 15 November 1967, Session 1967, pp.474-477.

¹³ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.44.

¹⁴ John Rear, 'We Run Them In', *FEER*, 23 November 1967, p.382-383. Also see *SCMP*, 11 November 1967, p.6.

tenements, in the blocks of flats, in the countryside; alertness to observe anything unusual or suspicious, and to report it.¹⁵

This statement by the Colonial Secretary had a very big brother is watching you sense to it. To the government, public support of the 'police state'¹⁶ gave it legitimacy and implied support for the colonial regime. The colonial officials were aware though, that more than co-option and the maintenance of law and order was needed to maintain stability. The events of 1966 had created an awareness of the need for political and social reforms of some description.

The colonial government chose to make reform of local administration the issue, instead of constitutional reform. That there was a recognition of the need for reform and that the government felt the need to diffuse the issue of reform in the Legco showed that they realised the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic. That the people of Hong Kong wanted some form of political reform was shown in statements by Urban Councillors:

Mr Hilton Cheong-Leen [said] that a large section of the community want to have some form of constitutional advance Mr Henry Hu proposed there should be a fully elected Urban Council Mr Brooke Bernacchi [said that] there should be at least a partly elected Leg Co, with some members whose eyes would be turned toward the people, not the Government.¹⁷

The promise of local administrative reform was an example of the colonial government's taking into account public wishes, but only if they were not detrimental to the status quo. A statement by the Governor in Legco showed this:

... I have consulted the Executive Council in very general terms, and I have ascertained from the Secretary of State that, since no major constitutional changes nor any changes involving this Council or the Executive Council are contemplated, no objections would be raised by him to a review of our present arrangements in the field of local authority administration.¹⁸

¹⁵ Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill 1967, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 15 November 1967, Session 1967, pp.461-462.

¹⁶ See 'How Freedom Began', Correspondence to the Editor, *SCMP*, 12 January 1966, p.12.

¹⁷ 'Urban Councils' appeal to Mrs Eirene White' [Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for the Colonies], *SCMP*, 5 January 1966, p.1.

¹⁸ Sir David Trench, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 24 February 1966, Session 1966, p.52.

As Frank Welsh observes: "... Sir David ... was one of the more reformist Governors; but like Sir Mark Young before him he found political advances difficult to achieve".¹⁹ This was due to the opposition of both Official and Unofficial members of the colonial government who benefited from the political status quo. Local administrative reform was a trade off for real constitutional reform.

The importance of local government reform to the maintenance of the status quo was attested to in a statement by Mr Fung Hon-chu, an Unofficial Legislative Councillor:

Contrary to popular belief, the people of Hong Kong generally are not as apathetic to public affairs as they appear to be. There is no doubt that the wind of change is blowing and those who see in the poor turn-out at Urban Council elections a sign of public indifference are using the wrong criteria, so drawing the wrong conclusions. The direction in which the wind is blowing is also clear. It is towards a greater say and participation by the people in the management of public affairs. The fact that the wind blows gently and not with the force of a typhoon merely indicates that the majority recognize our vulnerability to extraneous influences, are aware of the pitfalls inherent in major constitutional changes and that their seeming acquiescence with the present constitution stems from the belief that in Hong Kong's special circumstances it is best to make haste slowly and that the status quo may still be the safest bet. But those who think that changes are unnecessary just because the wind is blowing gently have misread the temper of our times. It is, therefore, incumbent on us to examine how best we can go about the task of introducing some changes into our system that will allow our people a greater measure of participation in the management of public affairs and yet be free from attendant dangers.²⁰

Though many of Mr Fung's points were very enlightened, he was still an apologist for the benevolent autocracy of colonial rule. The comment to 'make haste slowly' in terms of political reform reinforced this and was advice that the Governor and his Councillors followed loyally.

¹⁹ Welsh, p.464.

²⁰ Mr Fung Hon-chu, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 10 & 11 May 1966, Session 1966, p.131.

The Hong Kong Government set up a working party to consider local administrative reform. The Urban Council also set up an ad hoc committee to investigate its own reforms. The reports presented by the two institutions were fundamentally different in their visions for the future. The Urban Council plan recommended one body for the whole of Hong Kong with "administrative responsibility for strictly internal matters...,"²¹ which would have essentially given this council some authentic administrative power. The government's report, by contrast, recommended a number of municipal councils to take over the role of the Urban Council, and represented mere administrative changes rather than constitutional changes. There was obvious tension between the Elected and Official Urban Councillors that showed the paternalistic view of the colonial authorities. In a clash at one meeting, Mr Tingle, an Official nominated by the Governor as Chairperson, said: "... only a self-disciplined body could be adjudged worthy of increased power".²² It was clear that if the Urban Council was to be allowed any reforms it would depend on their acquiescence to government directives. The fate of the Urban Council plan was sealed when the Secretary for Chinese Affairs and other Official members voted against the plan. However some Official members abstained from voting.²³ This abstention was ostensibly a vote in favour of the plan because it was not practise for the Officials to vote against each other.

There was plenty of criticism of the government's report, known as the 'Dickenson Report'. The government's agenda was obviously political and opposed to increased power for the Urban Council; "... a single administrative body for the whole of the Urban areas would be a very powerful body and it could be penetrated if it had an elected membership. Once one had a body of such size and status penetrated politically it would be very dangerous".²⁴ Even members of the Working Party expressed reservations about the Report. The Hong Kong Civic Association called it a "divide and rule" policy, while the Chairman of the Hong Kong Socialist Democratic Party, Mr Sun Po-kwong, called the Report "a Farce because it did not really recommend any constitutional changes in the present form of government".²⁵ The Hong Kong Government rejected the Urban Council's

²¹ 'Blueprint for the Future', *SCMP*, 7 September 1966, p.1.

²² 'Clash in Urban Council Meeting', *ibid.*, 6 July 1966, p.1.

²³ 'Urban Council Argument', *ibid.*, 5 October 1966, p.1.

²⁴ 'Political Views Behind 'Dickenson Report'', *ibid.*, p.2.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 17 February 1967, p.6; & 27 February 1967, p.12.

plan and in considering their own Report the Governor repeated that reform would be a slow process in both time and form.²⁶ In actuality few changes took place, both reports being shelved. As Welsh observes: "With the dignified lack of haste that characterised reform in Hong Kong, it was not until 1973, after the production of a White Paper, that any changes were made in the Urban Council; even as late as 1992 there was still no majority of directly elected members of the Urban Council".²⁷

The colonial government's interest in constitutional political reform was negligible. Their aim was to preserve the autocratic colonial status quo and, at this time, to appear interested in local government reform was their way of placating the public and distracting public interest in more widespread political reform. The 1967 riots gave the government an excuse to put these plans on hold, but with some concessions. The Urban Council franchise was extended from 30,000 to 300,000 people,²⁸ but with complicated educational and professional conditions as eligibility qualifications. This was in no way an attempt to give more say to the man in the street. One letter to the editor about constitutional reform stated: "The final response of residents to have their names included as registered electors will indicate whether such a desire exists"; the editor of the same paper agreed: "[it is] in effect, a test case to discover whether there is a genuine and widespread interest in further constitutional reform".²⁹ In rebuttal one writer responded:

By all standards of Western democracy, the Hongkong Urban Council ... can rank only as an emasculated and debased attempt at faked democracy the people, with whose intelligence the Government of Hongkong may not trifle with impunity for ever, are most unlikely to show any interest in voting for 'Democracy' until what they are offered is universally recognisable as the 'real thing'.³⁰

For local government reform to be a test case for widespread interest in constitutional reform was untenable because of the limited franchise to a minority of the population. To judge what the majority wanted by the actions of this minority was impossible.

²⁶ See Sir David Trench, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 March 1967, Session 1967, p.77.

²⁷ Welsh, p.465.

²⁸ See 'Urban Council (Amendment) Bill 1966, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 6 April 1966, Session 1966, pp.246-249.

²⁹ Correspondence to the Editor, *SCMP*, 1 September 1966, p.12; 18 April 1966, p.10.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 5 September 1966, p.12. Also see *ibid.*, 26 November 1966, p.12; 11 March 1967, p.13.

While electoral registration was disappointing, there was a better than expected turnout at the Urban Council elections and this was despite the riots and disruption to the transportation services. The myth of apathy among the Hong Kong people was again undermined with a record turn out of voters.³¹ One councillor, Mrs Elsie Elliott (now Mrs Elsie Tu), whom the 1966 Commission of Inquiry had attempted to discredit, was returned to office with an overwhelming majority. Mrs Elliott was a spokesperson for the poor (and disenfranchised) people of Hong Kong. She had long been a thorn in the side of the government because of her outspokenness on social issues, especially on corruption within the police force. She states in her autobiography: "In the mist of the riots came voting day for the Urban Council, with no ferries or buses running. Yet there was a record turnout, and my name came to the top of the polls by a long way, with 76 percent of the votes".³² This victory was Mrs Elliott's vindication for the ill treatment she had received from the Commission. The myth of apathy was slowly being eroded.

Corruption in Hong Kong had long been institutionalised. Mrs Elliott forced discussion on the subject when, at an Urban Council meeting, she alleged deportation threats had been made to Hawkers by the police.³³ The colonial authorities retaliated swiftly and publicly: "Mr M.D.I. Gass, the Colonial Secretary, yesterday attacked allegations of official corruption in Hongkong made by Mrs Elsie Elliott at a meeting of the Urban Council as 'false or misleading' ".³⁴ That there was corruption, seemed to be widely accepted by Hong Kong's newspapers. Headlines, such as "CIVIL SERVANTS ON CORRUPTION CHARGE", "Policemen accused of Corruption",³⁵ were not uncommon. In October 1966 the Tai-o Police Station was revealed as a "Hotbed of Corruption From Top to Bottom".³⁶ The government refused to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem. The police force, as well as maintaining law and order, were, in the government's eyes, maintaining the status quo. Their suppression of the 1966 Kowloon

³¹ See Andrew Li & Francis Evens, 'Urban Renewal', *FEER*, 15 June 1967, p.638. Also see *SCMP*, 8 June 1967, p.1.

³² Elsie Elliott, *Crusade for Justice: An Autobiography* (Hong Kong, 1976), p.231.

³³ *SCMP*, 2 February 1966, p.1.

³⁴ *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 13 February 1966, p.1. Also see Elliott, pp.206-209.

³⁵ *SCMP*, 20 April 1966, p.9; 13 August, p.11. Also see *SCMP*, 17 May 1966, p.14; 13 July 1966, p.9; 16 July 1966, p.13; 4 August 1966, p.9; 6 September 1966, p.9.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 12 & 14 October 1966, p.8.

riots and their handling of the 1967 communist riots had boosted their reputation (like that of the government), services for which they were granted the title 'Royal Hong Kong Police Force'.³⁷ To accuse the police force of large scale corruption challenged the legitimacy of the entire colonial government.

The 1966 Commission of Inquiry into the 1966 Kowloon riots, which was instigated by the Governor Sir David Trench, forced the colonial authorities to acknowledge the existence of corruption in Hong Kong but they were quick to down-play the seriousness of the problem.³⁸ "The British understood that the charge of corruption could be used by opponents as an effective tactical weapon in undermining the legitimacy of established government".³⁹ The official response to charges of corruption was, once they had been acknowledged as having basis in fact, that this was a way of life in Hong Kong, putting blame on the public for the situation. The colonial attitude was that corruption was an inherently Chinese problem. Mr Heath, Commissioner of Police, testified at the riot inquiry: "The Chinese are terribly traditional and there's no doubt about it, tradition here favours corruption".⁴⁰ This was once again a case of Westerners creating a value system for the Chinese, which provoked heated exchanges in the local newspapers as can be seen from the rebuttal from this Chinese resident: "Corruption is not more inherent in the Chinese than in other peoples it must be clear that it was never condoned as 'a natural order of things' ".⁴¹ Such public debate forced the government to reconsider their position on corruption.

To maintain colonial hegemony the colonial authorities could no longer ignore and dismiss the issue of corruption.⁴² The government though was treading carefully. Mr Y.K. Kan stated in the Legco:

While this Council has from time to time been reminded of the 'high standard of service, conduct and morality' in the public service, and the 'unjust and irresponsible criticism' which tends to

³⁷ See Davies, p.57, n.45.

³⁸ See Welsh, p.490.

³⁹ T. Wing Lo, *Corruption and Politics in Hong Kong and China* (Buckingham, 1993), p.86.

⁴⁰ SCMP, 16 August 1966, p.9. Also see SCMP, 3 September 1966, p.6; 21 December 1967, p.14. "It was assumed too that only the lower ranks, all Chinese, were corrupt, while the more senior, expatriate policemen were honest; they were, after all, British", Welsh, p.491.

⁴¹ Correspondence to the Editor, SCMP, 1 September 1966, p.12. Also see SCMP, 20 August 1966, p.12.

⁴² See T. Wing Lo, p.87.

be levelled against it, the fact remains, as my honourable Friend, the Attorney General, has pointed out, that 'corruption does exist here to an extent which not only justifies, but demands, that the utmost efforts be made to eradicate it from our public and business affairs'.⁴³

The issue that caused the most concern was not corruption itself but whether an independent body should take over the police anti-corruption branch.⁴⁴ This was a sensitive issue due to the colonial regimes reliance on the police force for the maintenance of political stability in the colony.⁴⁵ It was decided that there should not be an independent body. The most likely reason for this was to keep the police force in submission; an independent body would certainly ruffle a few feathers. While the issue of corruption was obviously important, rather than tackling the issue head on, the government legislated more anti-corruption laws and left enforcement to the anti-corruption branch of the police. The government presented an image of itself as tackling the situation without actually doing very much. The colonial authorities followed the same tactic in regard to social reforms.

The 1967 Cultural Revolution riots gave the government the opportunity to discard any plans for political reform, though they continued to proclaim the gap as the root of all evil in Hong Kong society. Having essentially ignored calls for political reform, and played down the corruption issue, the government focused upon more consultation networks. In this way the government aimed to present itself as governing by consensus. In 1968, the implementation of a City District Officer scheme (CDO) replaced the expected local administration reform. Its function was to explain government policy to the people and to report public opinions to government.⁴⁶ This was an attempt to divert the political energies of the people by giving them a feeling of participating in the governing of the colony. As Ambrose Yeo-chi King points out: "The CDO, as the political agent at the district level, is not aiming at political mobilization of the populace; in fact, it is trying to depoliticize the political process".⁴⁷ It was a classic example of

⁴³ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 18 November 1970, Session 1970/71 (1 October 1970 - 30 September 1971), pp.190-191.

⁴⁴ See 'Prevention of Bribery Bill 1970', *ibid.*, 21 October 1970, Session 1970/71, pp.190-205; 18 November 1970, Session 1970/71, pp.131-143.

⁴⁵ See T. Wing Lo, p.88

⁴⁶ See Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.208-215.

⁴⁷ Ambrose Yeo-chi King, 'Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level', *Asian Survey*, 15:5(1975), p.437.

the government ignoring the fundamental issue and offsetting this by being seen to be doing something. It was "... an attempt to co-opt local élites and to diffuse urban discontent before it could gather momentum and find specific political expression".⁴⁸ The CDO scheme did not fundamentally alter the administration of the Hong Kong Government and the status quo remained in tact.

Another form of supposed consultative government was the Umelco Office (Office of Unofficial Executive and Legislative Councillors). The theory behind this office was that it would be a forum through which the public could make their views and complaints known to the government.⁴⁹ The downfall of these consultative systems was that they had no power to force the government to act upon or even listen to such views and complaints. They were, like the legislation against corruption, public relations exercises. This lack of redress on the part of the public led to a call for the institution of an ombudsman.⁵⁰ The colonial authorities were against this idea. Mr S.S. Gordon, an Unofficial Legislative Councillor stated in 1966: "On balance, it seems to me that, as yet, there is no need for an Ombudsman system in Hong Kong. So long as the Umelco office continues to receive the fullest co-operation it has enjoyed in the past I doubt if an Ombudsman could produce any better results".⁵¹ An Ombudsman independent of government control, unlike the CDO or Umelco, was certainly not advantageous to an administration attempting to maintain a complete hold on the government of the colony. The government's response was to co-opt the Unofficials by strengthening the Umelco office.⁵² The status quo was again maintained.

One issue that was the topic of much public discussion during this period, along with the lack of political reform, was that of promotions of local officers within the Civil Service. Stated government policy was that: "... recruitment of an overseas officer is not authorized unless ... there is no local officer available and qualified for appointment to the post".⁵³ Despite this localisation policy, virtually all important decision-making positions were in

⁴⁸ Scott, p.107.

⁴⁹ Editorial, 'U.M.E.L.C.O. AND ALL THAT', *SCMP*, 14 September 1966, p.2

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, 2 February 1966, p.8; 11 February 1966, p.6; 15 April 1966, p.6

⁵¹ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 10 & 11 March 1966, Session 1966, pp.120-121. Also see *SCMP*, 17 June 1966, p.7; 14 September 1966, p.8.

⁵² See Sir David Trench, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 October 1970, Session 1970/71, p.3; Mr Y.K. Kan, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 7 October 1970, Session 1970/71, p.66. Also see Scott, pp.114-116.

⁵³ Colonial Secretary, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 March 1967, Session 1967, pp.269-270.

the hands of expatriate staff. Mr Simon Li, Chairman of the Senior Non-Expatriate Officers' Association declared: "Our main complaint was that the plan to put more local qualified officers into key posts was moving too slowly. In fact, I would say that it is not moving at all".⁵⁴ One reason that the government expounded, concerning the lack of implementation of the policy, was that there was not enough qualified local staff to fill senior positions.⁵⁵ That this was disputed can be seen in letters to the *SCMP*: "... I do not believe that Hongkong does not have enough qualified staff to fill the various government departments. It is Government that is so reluctant to seek them out and to offer them a chance".⁵⁶ The domination of important civil service positions by expatriates allowed the government to retain a tight control over the bureaucracy, that is, to maintain their colonial hegemony which was essential to the maintenance of the status quo.

The colonial government's Eurocentric framework was also pointed out by complaints about the title of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (S.C.A.).⁵⁷ In a region populated by predominantly ethnic Chinese to have a Secretary for Chinese Affairs was indicative of both the ideology and priority of the government. This title had however been replaced by the more suitable title of Secretary for Home Affairs by 1970. This was achieved with little public agitation, as the government attempted to play down the colonial nature of the regime. This was not to be the case with the call for Chinese (Cantonese) to be declared a joint official language. The government was willing to alter the façade of British rule but not its fundamental ideology. Though the movement gained widespread support throughout the community⁵⁸ the government was extremely reluctant to listen to this public opinion to which they had proclaimed themselves to be so sensitive. That the Chinese language issue gained such wide public support clearly showed that the people of Hong Kong were not apathetic. Students began pressuring the government over the language issue:

⁵⁴ *SCMP*, 3 September 1966, p.6.

⁵⁵ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 March 1966, Session 1966, p.270.

⁵⁶ Correspondence to the Editor. *SCMP*, 21 May 1966, p.12. Also see *SCMP*, 18 March 1966, p.12; 26 May 1966, p.14

⁵⁷ Mr Fung Hon-chu, "I think the title of S.C.A. is outdated. the population being predominantly Chinese, all Government Departments could well be called Department for Chinese Affairs, since all of them deal principally with Chinese people", *Hong Kong Hansard*, 10 & 11 May 1966, Session 1966, p.133.

⁵⁸ See *SCMP*, 16 December 1966, p.12; 15 May 1967, p.6; 7 September 1967, p.8; 27 November 1967, p.6.

In July 1970, the students issued a statement accusing the government of ignoring public opinion by persisting with policies which discriminated against the use of Chinese. This statement won the support of a number of social organisations, but the government still refused to yield. The Acting Colonial Secretary maintained that he did not know what an official language was and that bilingual versions of legislation were not feasible because there was no demand for a Chinese version ...⁵⁹

Public pressure though was too great to maintain this position. In line with its usual tactics, a committee was set up to examine the use of Chinese in official business.⁶⁰ In this way legitimacy was maintained while no promises were made.

The government had been wary of student movements for many years, with every effort made to discourage any type of political activity at school or university; for example at public schools teachers were not allowed to discuss politics.⁶¹ In July 1966 at a school prize-giving Mr C.Y. Kwan, the government's senior Chinese adviser, advised students to refrain from indulging in politics,⁶² which provoked many letters to the editor, such as the following: "Mr Kwan is entitled to his own views and opinions, but ... if this is what he says publicly, I shudder to think what he is advising His Excellency in private on what the Chinese people think and want".⁶³ The Hong Kong Federation of Students announced the setting up of a Current Affairs Committee in December 1967 "... to promote and encourage political knowledge and interest among students of Hongkong".⁶⁴ Students were not at all indifferent towards their society, staging many protests against government policies during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁵ The students, like the general population of Hong Kong were not apathetic. They were civic-minded and politically aware. The colonial government recognised this and for this reason put in place (seemingly) major social reforms after the

⁵⁹ Scott, p.111.

⁶⁰ Colonial Secretary, "Its terms of reference are 'to examine the use of Chinese in official business and to advise on practicable ways and means in which the use of Chinese might be further extended in the interests of good administration and for the convenience of the public' ", *Hong Kong Hansard*, 9 October 1970, Session 1970-71, p.119.

⁶¹ Fung, 'Some Contributory Factors', p.308.

⁶² Editorial, 'STUDENTS AND POLITICS', *SCMP*, 19 July 1966, p.8.

⁶³ Correspondence to the Editor, *ibid.*, 19 July 1966, p.10.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 31 December 1967, p.2.

⁶⁵ See Fung, 'Some Contributory Factors', pp.302-305.

riots of 1966/67 in an attempt to prevent this awareness and concern from turning into political activism.

Four major areas of social reform were a cause of concern for the colonial government; these were education, social welfare, labour and housing. As stated previously, the Hong Kong Government was traditionally ambivalent in these areas involving itself as little as possible in social affairs and preferring to let the free-market economy dictate demand and response. Government assistance to the needy was negligible, except in the case of housing, though this continued to be a major concern for the government throughout the period. It seemed to be policy to spend as little as possible; as Welsh states: "... under the Hong Kong system, departments consistently reported large surpluses without incurring any criticism".⁶⁶ The effect of the 1966/67 riots was to force the government into the realisation that their 'hands off' policy was no longer acceptable to the rising generation of Hong Kong people, and that reforms were essential. These reforms were slow to materialise and, though paving the way for future reform, were more realistically seen as government public relations exercises. The political stability of the colony had been in jeopardy, and the demonstrated political consciousness of the Hong Kong Chinese had to be quieted. Social reforms were therefore essential to the maintenance of the status quo but as little reform as possible over as long a period as possible seemed to be the government's response.

The lack of adequate primary and secondary education was a major complaint for the people of Hong Kong. They were also concerned with poor education standards, fees and an examination system that determined a child's schooling career from kindergarten level to secondary school. Mrs Elsie Elliott (a school teacher herself) stated that: "Hongkong was afflicted by outdated education policies, maintained by 'faceless people', which were burdening and crippling its young people educationally".⁶⁷ The colonial authorities tended to think of education in terms of current expenditure rather than as an investment in the future. It was this ideology that incurred criticism from the public. The government continually fell back on the argument that financial restraints prevented far-reaching reforms and that gradual reforms were in any case more appropriate for the colony. As

⁶⁶ Welsh, p.462.

⁶⁷ 'EDUCATION POLICY ATTACKED', *SCMP*, 2 December 1967, p.6.

was the case with other reforms, the government preferred to move slowly while being seen to be confronting the issue, so as not to disturb the status quo. Reformists on the other hand felt that "... the real problem is not whether Government has enough money ... but whether Government intends to spend it".⁶⁸ A view substantiated by evidence that government departments usually underspent their budgets, as stated above by Frank Welsh.

There was a widespread call from the Hong Kong public for compulsory free education.⁶⁹ While it was the government's stated aim to provide free universal primary education, it was a very long term aim. Mr Gregg, Director of Education, in 1967 said: "The White Paper which was published in 1965, reaffirmed Government's long-term aim for free primary education. It said quite frankly, the free part of it was perhaps a long-term policy".⁷⁰ The Hong Kong Government did commit itself to providing free universal education by 1971, so in response to criticism, the government could point to the fact that it was on their agenda. The Education Bill providing free primary education, passed in September 1971, was the crowning achievement of progress made by Sir David Trench before he retired as Governor. Secondary schooling though was neglected and did not become free until 1976 and the question of the quality of education remained a constant source of criticism directed towards the colonial authorities. While the government did face some difficulties in these areas, they seemed to retain the sentiment that an educated population was a danger for the foreign colonial regime. It was for this reason that the discussion of anything political was banned in state funded schools.⁷¹ As Fung Yee-wang stated: "The students and educated workers prove to be a source of headache for the British [colonial] Government in its struggle to maintain the unstable equilibrium".⁷²

The Commission of Inquiry into the 1966 riots had pointed to the urgent need for social reforms within the colony, especially in the form of a more comprehensive social welfare scheme. In 1967 the government was spending

⁶⁸ Portia Ho, 'A Matter of Principle', *FEER*, 3 February 1966, p.216. Also see Correspondence to the editor, *SCMP* 1 July 1966, p.10.

⁶⁹ See *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 29 May 1966, p.12. Also see *SCMP*, 7 October 1966, p.9; 13 December 1966, p.7.

⁷⁰ *SCMP*, 21 December 1967, p.16.

⁷¹ See Fung, 'Some Contributory Factors', p.308.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.294.

only 1.1% of its budget on social welfare.⁷³ The colonial authorities could no longer maintain their hands off approach without reinforcing the feeling among the public that they did not care. With political concessions virtually non-existent, the government was forced to re-evaluate its social policies if order and stability were to be maintained. Yet despite government pronouncements that advances were being made little had been achieved apart from the introduction of a cash assistance scheme in 1971.⁷⁴ The colonial authorities were more concerned to find ways to keep the youth of the colony (who had little educational opportunities) occupied. One Legislative Councillor suggested "... outdoor training centres for youth which might be the very solution to forestall such incidents as the Kowloon riots such as suggested in the Report of Inquiry of the Kowloon riots".⁷⁵ It would appear from statements such as these, that any reforms in the social policy of the government were brought about solely because of, and principally to prevent, incidents such as had taken place in 1966 (and 1967). This was in no way an act of moral obligation on the part of the government, nor was it one they were rushing into; by 1971-72 only two per cent of government expenditure went to social welfare.⁷⁶

Labour conditions were another factor brought to light by the riots of 1966-67. Hong Kong, at this time, was widely criticised as a sweatshop. Labour conditions were certainly very bad, as England states: "There is evidence to show that before 1970 Hong Kong workers had probably the longest working day and longest working week of city-dwellers in South-East Asia".⁷⁷ Coupled with long working hours was low wages (no minimum wage existed) and little job security. By 1967 the government was bowing to public pressure to legislate for the reduction of working hours, especially for women and young persons. Employers were not happy with this development. Their attitudes to their Chinese workers were amply demonstrated in a *FEER* article:

Many employers doubt whether there is any real call by workers for a reduction in hours of work. Chinese workers [an employers' spokesman claimed], have no concept of leisure. If hours of work

⁷³ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 15 March 1967, Session 1967, p.125.

⁷⁴ See Nelson Chow, "The Past and Future Development of Social Welfare in Hong Kong" in *Hong Kong in Transition*, p.405.

⁷⁵ Mr Wilfred S.B. Wong, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 16 March 1967, Session 1967, p.186.

⁷⁶ England, p.16.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.134.

were reduced, people would simply get a part-time job to make use of this spare time. This spokesman denied that this willingness to work every possible minute reflected any need to supplement inadequate incomes. Chinese, apparently, simply love to work.

The Commissioner of Labour, Mr J.T. Wakefield, tended to agree that Chinese on the whole are not very anxious to increase their free time.⁷⁸

Despite these attitudes the government did introduce in 1967 a plan for a gradual reduction of working hours for women and youths to eight hours a day and 48 hours a week by December 1971.⁷⁹ The Employment Ordinance of 1967 did represent a leap forward for workers and paved the way for further labour reform. Again the year 1971 was the year for accomplishing the colonial government's goals, reflecting the administration's caution, not wanting rapid reform that might disturb the status quo. It is significant that 1971 was also the year of retirement for Sir David Trench as Governor of the colony. Sir David was therefore able to leave his post proclaiming great social advances in Hong Kong under his governorship.

It was, for Sir David, important that some achievements be made in the social sphere, as he had been impeded in other areas of reform by lack of desire among the elite of the colony to allow the show case of democracy in Asia to be anything more than show.

When he retired in 1971 the system of local government, or lack of one, was exactly the same as when he arrived. This was in part a consequence of the 1967 riots, but it was chiefly because of the opposition of senior administrators and heads of departments to any significant devolution of power from the centre.⁸⁰

The population of Hong Kong had been denied political freedom when the promised local government reform was abandoned in 1967. The belief in the apparent apathy of the Hong Kong people had been shown to be misplaced by the events of 1966/67. The government, by refusing to give way on political concessions, had little choice but to begin reform in social aspects of the colony. In this way the colonial government overcame its crisis of legitimacy.

⁷⁸ L.F. Goodstadt, 'What About the Workers?', *FEER*, 23 June 1966, p.617.

⁷⁹ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 29 November 1967, Session 1967, p.482.

⁸⁰ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.78.

By being seen to be concerned with the feelings and welfare of the people the government of Hong Kong was able to quell political agitation, though in fact reforms made were few and far between. The people of Hong Kong saw that they were now in a position to pressure the colonial authorities in order to better their lives. Without the chance of direct political participation the people of Hong Kong used indirect methods of gaining concessions. In this way any major issue in Hong Kong became a political issue because the colonial authorities were compelled to address these issues so as to maintain the status quo. The benevolent autocracy of the Hong Kong political system benefited the Hong Kong elite, both Chinese and expatriate. It was in their interests to perpetuate the myth of apathy about the Hong Kong population. That there was an (unspoken) recognition of the political awareness of this population was evidenced when the colonial authorities went to great pains to convince the public that they were in fact consulted and taken into consideration in the formation of policies. The British Government made a well-thought choice for the next governor. Sir Murray MacLehose was against political reform, and in recognition of the need to quell public dissatisfaction at having no political rights, he made social reform the cornerstone of his governorship.

CHAPTER FOUR

A REDIRECTION OF POLICY

The governorship of Sir Murray MacLehose, begun in 1971, saw a change in direction from the traditional hands-off policy of the Hong Kong Government to the social welfare of the people of Hong Kong. This was a period in which the relationship between China and Britain was becoming increasingly cordial. With China's admission to the United Nations, and their demand that Hong Kong be taken off the list of territories to be decolonised, it was clear that political stability within the colony had to be maintained. MacLehose began removing the semblance of colonialism, though I will continue to refer to Hong Kong as a colony because it remained one constitutionally. The issue of corruption provoked a major crisis of legitimacy for the Hong Kong Government at this time and led to the creation of an Independent Commission Against Corruption. The government was now concerned about its image and in response to calls for political reform concentrated on aspects of social reform for the colony. It was the government's aim to maintain the political status quo of the colony. Substantial political reform was therefore rejected and was substituted by the creation of greater channels of communication between the government and the people. Despite these efforts the gap remained and calls for further political and social reform continued.

The governorship of Sir Murray MacLehose, November 1971 to May 1982, brought to the colony a fundamental redirection in policy which was characterised by a shifting away from the colonial government's traditional hands off policy, to one of increased emphasis on the welfare of Hong Kong's people. Social change was to be the objective of the new regime, the British Government preferring this to political change in the form of more representative government. This new emphasis on social reform was designed to quell agitation for political reform and maintain stability. The logic behind this policy seems to have been that by being seen to care for the welfare of the Hong Kong people and seen to be committed to improving their lifestyle, the colonial government and its benevolent autocracy would become more popular, and the issue of political reform would therefore be dissipated. This showed that the colonial government realised their myth of

apathy was not the reality. However the reforms made could not compare with those of other industrialised nations. "Policies proliferated but only if one compares Hong Kong *with itself*. Generally speaking policies were kept to a minimum ...".¹ Political stability within Hong Kong was all-important at this time and this was why MacLehose was chosen for the position of Governor.

In the eyes of the British Government MacLehose was the ideal man for the governorship in the changing political climate of the 1970s. He had served in both China and Hong Kong previously, and was well known by the Chinese authorities, confirming that Britain's relationship with China was an important factor in the choice of Sir Murray for Governor of Hong Kong. Britain and China had resumed negotiations for the exchange of ambassadors in the early 1970s.² British Governments had, since the end of World War Two, realised China's intention to recover Hong Kong.

The firmest indication of Peking's thoughts on timing came in remarks by Zhou Enlai to Malcolm Macdonald (the former Commissioner-General for South-east Asia) in 1971, to the effect that China had no intention of seeking to recover Hong Kong until the expiry of the New Territories lease The implication was clear that 1997 would be the watershed.³

MacLehose went into office fully aware of China's position on Hong Kong and of Britain's acquiescence to that position.

Over two weeks in 1972 the future of Hong Kong became clear to the world. On 28 February 1972 the American Government issued the Shanghai Communiqué⁴ abandoning their previous 'two Chinas' policy (ie mainland China and Taiwan as two separate Chinas). This was a clear attempt at rapprochement with the mainland government. Eight days later, on 8 March 1972, Huang Hua demanded that Hong Kong and Macau be taken off the list of Territories to be decolonised.

¹ Peter Harris, "Policy Process and Policy Formulation in Hong Kong", p.44.

² See *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 28 February 1971, Volume 832, 1971, p.48, & 2 August 1971, Volume 822, 1971, p.1068.

³ Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China* (London, 1994), p.162.

⁴ "The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States does not challenge that position", Welsh, p.471.

As is known to all, the questions of Hong Kong and Macau belong to the category of questions resulting from the series of unequal treaties left over by history, treaties which the imperialists imposed on China. Hong Kong and Macau are part of Chinese territory The settlement of the questions of Hong Kong and Macau is entirely within China's sovereign right The Chinese delegation is opposed to including Hong Kong and Macau on the list of colonial Territories covered by the Declaration and requests that the erroneous wording that Hong Kong and Macau fall under the category of so-called 'colonial Territories' be immediately removed from the documents of the Special Committee and all other United Nations documents .⁵

Britain did not object to this demand; instead, five days later, on 13 March 1972, the British and Chinese Governments issued a joint communiqué⁶ establishing full diplomatic relations. It was MacLehose's mission to preserve the political status quo and prepare Hong Kong for its eventual return to China.

While committed to preserving the colonial status quo of Hong Kong Sir Murray did make some changes to the colonial façade, for example he renamed the Colonial Secretary the Chief Secretary.⁷ A popular measure taken early in Sir Murray's governorship, which was arguably long overdue, was the extension of the use of the Chinese language in government business, as reported in the *SCMP*: "Government will use the Chinese language whenever possible This is a forward move from the previous policy of using the language only when considered necessary".⁸ This was followed by giving the Chinese (Cantonese) language and the English language equal status in the Legco in 1972.⁹ Chinese speaking members of the Legco enthusiastically adopted the chance to address the council in

⁵ A/AC.109/396, United Nations General Assembly, *Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People*, Letter dated 8 March 1972 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Special Committee. Also see *SCMP*, 11 March 1972, p.1.

⁶ "Both confirming the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each others affairs and equality and mutual benefit The Government of the United Kingdom, acknowledging the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic of China The Government of the United Kingdom recognise the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China", *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 13 March 1972, Volume 833, 1972, p.35.

⁷ See Welsh, pp.485-486.

⁸ *SCMP*, 18 March 1972, p.4.

⁹ See Address by H.E. the Governor, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 18 October 1972, Session 1972/73, p.2.

Chinese. Dr Chung, the Senior Unofficial of the Legco, expounded the importance of this step:

The introduction of simultaneous interpretation in both the Legislative and Urban Councils has not only aroused greater interest in the public concerning the work of these two Councils but, more important, has opened the way for competent and public-spirited yet non-English speaking persons to serve on these Councils.¹⁰

That the speaking of English had been a prerequisite for appointment to the Legco showed the elitist nature of the colonial regime in a population where the most common language was Chinese (Cantonese).

There had been, since the 1960s, a movement pushing for the introduction of Chinese as a joint official language. During the early 1970s this was a major issue with the student movement. Though again the government responded slowly to public pressure, they finally recognised Chinese as an official language in 1974.¹¹ However this did not mean the equal usage of the Chinese language, especially in the courts. That the government did not really consider Chinese an important language was attested to by the fact that the laws of the colony were not translated into Chinese. As Peter Harris states:

The campaign to establish Chinese as an official language was successful in its broad objective, that of giving recognition (or face?) to the language of the vast majority of the people. The 'victory' for the language lobby was, however, substantially slight. A formal recognition of Chinese in official business should not be confused with the practical supremacy of English in spheres of business, commerce and government.¹²

Again the colonial government had responded to public pressure but had only given as much as was necessary to placate the public. While Chinese ostensibly had equal status with the English language, English continued to be the most important language for the government and business.

¹⁰ Dr Chung, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 October 1974, Session 1974/75 (16 October 1974 - 13 August 1975), p.42.

¹¹ See Kuan Hsin-chi, 'Political Stability and Change in Hong Kong' in *Hong Kong. Economic, Social and Political Studies in Development*, p.158; P. Hodge, 'Expectations and Dilemmas of Social Welfare in Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong: Dilemmas of Growth*, p.481; Fung, 'Some Contributory Factors', pp.302-305.

¹² Peter Harris, *Hong Kong: A Study in Bureaucracy and Politics* (Hong Kong, 1988), p.49.

Student involvement in the Chinese language campaign during the 1960s and in the 1970s had shown that, far from being apathetic, the students were willing to challenge the colonial regime's Eurocentric policies. Those government officials who wished to maintain the status quo actively discouraged criticism, especially the involvement of students in politics, for example students of Hong Kong University were warned not to engage in "radical political acts".¹³ Students engaged in political acts were seen as a threat to the status quo and were generally reported in the English language press as radicals, leftist, or anti-British, as one correspondent observed "... criticism ... is looked on and treated as an 'anti-government activity' ".¹⁴ Headlines such as "Police smash anti-British student move" appeared in newspapers, and again "Hundreds of plain clothes police will today mingle with crowds ... because of a student threat to disrupt the big Queen's Birthday Celebration".¹⁵ The huge police turnout was evidence of the colonial authorities concern over student movements but officially government officials continued to reiterate the myth of apathy. For example Acting Colonial Secretary, Mr Kidd, stated that: "Local university students are somewhat limited in their outlook, showing little knowledge or interest in local or international public affairs".¹⁶ This statement, made at a time when students' activities were becoming increasingly frequent and vocal showed that the government's attitude to such activities was that they were either to be denounced or ignored.

The student movement was active in demonstrations protesting at America's giving Japan the island of Tiao Yu Tai, the ownership of which was disputed by the Chinese Government. Such demonstrations certainly put the accuracy of the above statement by Mr Kidd into question. Though the police had refused permission for the Tiao Yu Tai rally to be held at Edinburgh Place in the Central District, and despite warnings against doing so, the students went ahead with their rally in open defiance of the law.¹⁷ The police did not try to stop the march and the protest was peaceful, yet the media headlined this as "Police courtesy heads off student trouble".¹⁸ It can

¹³ *SCMP*, 18 February 1972, p.1.

¹⁴ Letters to the Editor, *SCMP*, 2 February 1972, p.7. Also see Hodge, p.481.

¹⁵ *SCMP*, 20 April 1972, p.1; 21 April 1972, p.1

¹⁶ *SCMP*, 31 August 1972, p.5.

¹⁷ See *SCMP*, 6 May 1972, p.1; 10 May 1972, p.9; 11 May 1972, p.7; 12 May 1972, p.1; 13 May 1972, p.1.

¹⁸ *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 14 May 1972, p.1.

be concluded from this that it was not protesters that would have caused trouble but police action against protesters that made a situation volatile. This was one student protest tacitly ignored by the colonial authorities. Another that could neither be ignored nor denounced was the mass movement against corruption.

Mrs Elsie Elliott had long been a crusader against corruption within the police force and the government. Her continuing attacks on the government to do something about corruption had been dismissed because she produced no evidence, which she in turn strongly disputed.¹⁹ It was not only Mrs Elliott who was concerned about official reaction to corruption. One correspondent made an excellent point when he stated: "... it is not the public who is to gather evidence. The public is to report suspected corruption and you [the police] must gather the evidence".²⁰ However the Anti-corruption Office was making headway and their findings produced a major crisis of legitimacy for the colonial government. It was discovered in 1973 that Chief Superintendent Peter Godber, a hero of the 1966/67 riots, had received bribes that ran into millions of dollars.²¹ This discovery shattered the colonial government's complacent attitude towards corruption. Mrs Elliott's accusations that corruption existed in the highest levels of the police force had been vindicated.

The real scandal came when Godber escaped from Hong Kong and went to England while under investigation, creating a huge public out-cry. "Young people rallied on the streets shouting the slogan 'Fight Corruption, Catch Godber' ".²² This incident damaged colonial authority as it had never been damaged before. The benevolent autocracy, the claim of colonial rule by law, began to be questioned by the people of Hong Kong. It could no longer be claimed that the people of Hong Kong accepted corruption as a way of life or that they were apathetic to the problems within their society. "This dramatic incident had, in fact, transformed corruption from a social problem into a political issue concerning the justice of colonial rule as a whole".²³ To maintain its legitimacy the response of the colonial government to public

¹⁹ See *SCMP*, 28 September 1972, p.8; 30 September 1972, p.7; 1 October 1972, p.6; 5 October 1972, p.8.

²⁰ Letters to the Editor, *SCMP*, 9 November 1972, p.12.

²¹ Welsh, p.491.

²² T. Wing Lo, p.89.

²³ A. King, 'An Institutional Response to Corruption: The ICAC of Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong: Dilemmas of Growth*, p.117.

pressure was, for once, swift.²⁴ The response led, in 1974, to the setting up of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). If public apathy was as prevalent as supporters of the political status quo insisted there would have been no need for the urgent actions taken by the Governor. The reality was that it was the people of Hong Kong who forced the government to take action, the implication being, as had happened many times before, that the government would have done little to seriously address the problem.

The creation of the ICAC reinforced, in the public's eyes, the idea of the colonial government's commitment to eradicating corruption and that the voice of the people was being heard. The government had no choice but to act on the corruption issue; it was essential to the maintenance of political stability in the colony. The government did not act, however, on calls for a more representative form of government for the colony, reforms that would have disturbed the status quo. Calls were constantly made for a broader representation of public opinion in the Legco, even from within the council itself. Dr Chung stated in 1974:

Sir, the Unofficial Members also consider that there is a need to appoint to this Council persons from a broader segment of society so as to widen the range of expert knowledge of the Unofficials and to ensure also a fuller expression of the views of the whole people of Hong Kong.²⁵

While the Governor continued to expand the number of Unofficials on the Council this was always balanced by an expansion in the number of Officials. The Governor though did not go so far as to appoint known critics to the council. In 1972 there had been a major campaign to petition the Governor to appoint Mrs Elsie Elliott to the Legco because she was an elected Urban Councillor and well known to many of the poorer people of Hong Kong.²⁶ This petition was ignored. The government continued to see the Unofficials, as indeed the Unofficials saw themselves, as not constituting an opposition to the government.²⁷

²⁴ See *ibid.*, p.117; T. Wing Lo, p.91; Harris, *Hong Kong: A Study in Bureaucracy*, pp.177-179; Elliott, pp.247-248.

²⁵ Dr Chung, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 October 1974, Session 1974/75, p.43.

²⁶ See *SCMP*, 5 April 1972, p.1; 28 April 1972, p.7; 13 July 1972, p.4; 15 July 1972, p.1.

²⁷ See for example Mr Woo, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 November 1972, Session 1972/73, p.51.

Just as there was no interest in encouraging a political opposition in the 1970s neither was constitutional reform on the government's agenda. The *Asia 1976 Yearbook* reported:

In January [1975], Minister of State at the Foreign Office ... on a visit to Hongkong, made unguarded but nonetheless cautious and ambiguous remarks about Hongkong's 'advance to elective self-government'. Constitutional reform instantly became a leading issue The Governor, in his October speech to Legco, was only prepared to concede that 'there is plenty of room for change while retaining the essential character of this council ...'.²⁸

This type of ambiguity was typical of the British Government. Elective self-government had been promised to the people of Hong Kong time and again, and public response showed that this would have been a welcome move. But the essential character of the Legco was compliance to the status quo and elected representation would damage this hegemony. It would appear that the question of constitutional reform was occasionally discussed by the authorities as an olive branch to offer reformists, but it was not seriously considered by the government. Instead of reform the government continued to focus upon the gap between themselves and the public.

The government's avowed contention since the late 1960s, that they were working at closing the gap, had not been believed by the public as the government had hoped it would be. One correspondent wrote that the government "... by their utterances have astounded the Public with the lack of interest and awareness of what the public wants and hopes for".²⁹ This was not a gap of information; it was a gap caused by the refusal of the colonial administration to admit that their forms of consultation with the public were inadequate and lacking in credibility. The CDOs were claimed to be the "... nucleus of a highly complex two-way information channel at the grass-roots",³⁰ but in reality these offices essentially functioned as transmitters of information from the government to the public.³¹ Unofficials in the Legco made statements that the people felt no sense of belonging, that

²⁸ *Asia 1976 Yearbook*, p.159.

²⁹ *SCMP*, 1 September 1972, p.10.

³⁰ *SCMP*, 25 October 1972, p.2.

³¹ See Lau, 'The Government, Intermediate Organizations, and Grass-Roots Politics in Hong Kong', p.876; King, 'Administrative Absorption of Politics', p.436.

they should be encouraged to build neighbourhood networks.³² Directing the public's concerns to neighbourhood issues would localise issues, and would discourage a colony-wide collective movement. Any threat to the administration was dissipated by dividing the public's attentions. These tactics seemed to acknowledge political potential in the populace rather than political apathy.

The government did institute two major colony wide social welfare campaigns, but as these were controlled by the administration, and were in effect reinforcements of colonial rule, they posed no political threat to the status quo. One of these movements was the 'Keep Hongkong Clean Campaign' instituted in November 1972. This campaign had a decidedly big brother look to it, with posters displaying the huge hand of the government pointing to a small littering person.³³ One commentator observed that the campaign would be a "Test of the Governor's leadership".³⁴ The second campaign was the 'Fight Violent Crime Campaign'. As often happens in difficult political situations, the increasing rate of crime became a major issue, which became the main focus of the government's and the public's attentions. One Unofficial Legislative Councillor stated: "The present rate of crime in Hong Kong is abnormal. We have therefore to adopt some abnormal measures to cope with abnormal circumstances".³⁵ The Public Order (Amendment) Bill 1972 and 1973 gave the police even stronger arbitrary powers.³⁶ This campaign also had a big brother connotation when the Commissioner of Police called on the housewives of the colony to be the "Eyes that watch, voices that speak".³⁷ Involving the public in community affairs, though, could not bridge the gap.

³² For example: Mr Wang, "The present inability of the man on the street to enjoy any meaningful relationship with Government officials is indeed illustrative of the gap between the Government and the people. It is a mistake to think, Sir, that this is merely an information gap. The steps being taken to close the information gap and provide a free flow of information between Government and the community are excellent, but they do not touch the real nature of the gap. What is needed is some arrangement whereby the views and needs of the people in the neighbourhood can be translated into action through their own involvement", *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 November 1972, Session 1972/73, p.70.

³³ See *SCMP*, 5 September 1972, p.7; and issues throughout November.

³⁴ *SCMP*, 15 August 1972, p.2.

³⁵ Mr Wang, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 13 December 1972, Session 1972/73, p.260.

³⁶ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 13 December 1972, Session 1972/73, pp.260-266; 23 May 1973, Session 1972/73, pp.818-820.

³⁷ *SCMP*, 6 December 1972, p.6,

It should have been obvious that this gap could only be bridged by more representative government but instead the colonial authorities continued to rely on their channels of consultation. This was especially true of the Umelco system. Reports in the newspaper stated: "UMELCO's success undermines case for Hong Kong Ombudsman", and "Umelco assists the ordinary people: grass-roots problems tackled".³⁸ This however was not the case; as with the CDOs the Umelco office was essentially an office for the transmission of information from the government to the people; "... its self-declared mission as an intermediary between the government and people [was] by and large unrealized".³⁹ While the colonial authorities continued to view the roles of the consultation channels as mechanisms for the downward flow of information, the gap could never be bridged because the government made no serious attempt to stimulate the flow of information upwards. These so called channels of communication were designed to make the public feel as if the government cared about their problems whereas, in fact "UMELCO, the ward offices and the city district offices [were], like so many governmental outgrowths in Hong Kong, pragmatic top-dressing".⁴⁰

So it was with the Urban Council, the only form of supposed democracy in the colony, or what could more aptly be called the window-dressing of democracy. With little real reform taking place in the Legco, the Urban Council became the focus of administrative reform despite there being, in the words of the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas Home, "... no demand for significant change".⁴¹ There was certainly no demand for significant change from those appointed to the council by the Governor; even the elected members called for only moderate reform that would give them a majority in the council.⁴² Elected members believed that an elected majority was essential to encourage people to vote. The call for an elected majority was based on the premise that few registered or voted in the Urban Council elections because it was a politically emasculated body, that is, it had no real power to influence the government. One Chinese voter believed that "If Government gives a strong majority to the elected representatives, this would in turn give more assurance to the public that their voice is heard,

³⁸ *SCMP*, 26 August 1972, p.6; 31 August 1972, p.4.

³⁹ Lau Siu-kai, "The government, Intermediate Organizations, and Grass-Roots Politics in Hong Kong", p.878.

⁴⁰ S.N.G. Davies, p.72.

⁴¹ *SCMP*, 19 February 1972, p.2.

⁴² See *SCMP*, 12 January 1972, p.5.

and encourage more eligible people in Hongkong to register as voters and participate in local government affairs".⁴³ Despite intense lobbying from elected Urban Councillors, the 'Urban Council (Amendment) Bill 1973', while removing all official civil servant members, increased the elected membership by two to 12, though with a like increase in government appointed non-civil servant members.⁴⁴

An elected majority to the Urban Council was not even considered. To allow this would risk, in the eyes of the colonial government, the stability of the colony. To allow an elected majority in the council would have given the elected Urban Councillors a mandate from the voters that would have been difficult to dismiss. The colonial government though had many ways of preserving (or co-opting) loyalty to the regime through what Ambrose King has coined "the administrative absorption of politics".⁴⁵ This was demonstrated by Urban Councillors, in a near-scandalous fashion in 1972. The Urban Council had traditionally been used as a forum to air the grievances of the public, though not within the strict confines of council business. In 1972 an elected Councillor proposed that a Standing Order be amended so that "all motions shall be confined to matters within the jurisdiction of the Urban Council".⁴⁶ Only three Councillors opposed the motion which the press reported as "URBCO'S DECISION 'TO GAG ITSELF' ".⁴⁷ This also happened to be at a time when the Governor was considering candidates for the Legco and the amendment prompted swift public condemnation:

It is not a surprise at all and it is understandable for these learned elected Councillors to make this motion and pass it. In a month or so, the government will appoint a certain number of members of the public to the Legislative Council. These learned gentlemen know well that the vital qualification and requirement for one to be appointed to this Council is to be a 'Yes Man.' And this is the best time now to show that they possess such fine qualifications and requirements.⁴⁸

⁴³ SCMP, 25 February 1972, p.8.

⁴⁴ 'Urban Council (Amendment) Bill 1973', *Hong Kong Hansard*, 3 January 1973, Session 1972/73, p.288; 'Urban Council Bill 1973', 31 January 1973, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 3 January 1973, Session 1972/73, pp.382-388.

⁴⁵ King, 'Administrative Absorption of Politics', pp.422-439.

⁴⁶ SCMP, 5 April 1972, p.5.

⁴⁷ SCMP, 12 April 1972, p.9.

⁴⁸ SCMP, 12 April 1972, p.9; see also 3 April 1972, p.9; 21 April 1972, p.9; 25 April 1972, p.9.

This administrative absorption of politics again implies that people of Hong Kong were not as apathetic as the government would have had people believe. It was far easier for the protagonists of the status quo to reiterate the purported fact that because few people registered or voted there was no desire for political change. The Editor of the *SCMP* wrote: "The dismal results of Government's campaign to enroll [sic] voters for the Urban Council elections is a fair answer to those advocates of 'democracy' ... and internal self-rule. Hongkong just isn't interested".⁴⁹ This view undoubtedly left the colonial authorities in a comfortable position, but it was a view disproved by the mere fact that people were calling for a more representative government. As one voter put it:

Why should we be accused of political apathy when in actuality we're voting for a minority and a relatively powerless one at that? In considering the motives behind the pig for candidacy [a student campaign aimed at highlighting the futility of the elections] and the 1971 Boycott the Urban Council Election Campaign, perhaps we need to implement a system worth the vote.⁵⁰

It was clear that the people of Hong Kong were not apathetic, that it was the system that discouraged them from taking part. The system was designed to foster apathy and while people did not take part the colonial government was able to perpetuate the myth of political apathy of the Hong Kong people.

This myth of apathy was again used as an explanation for the slow rate of localisation in the civil service. The government continually referred to this localisation policy when questioned about the promotion of local officers, "... to recruit overseas officers only when suitable and qualified local candidates are not available".⁵¹ This may have been the policy but the reality was somewhat different. The government pointed to the fact that the number of local officers in the senior administration was increasing, yet the total number of the civil service was increasing, and with it the number of expatriate officers. In 1973 of the 362 super-scale posts, 92 were held by local staff and 270 by expatriates, but in 1975 of 471 officers, 118 were local staff. This was an increase of 83 expatriate officers to only 26 local

⁴⁹ *SCMP*, 11 May 1972, p.2.

⁵⁰ *SCMP*, 12 December 1972, p.12.

⁵¹ The Colonial Secretary, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 22 January 1975, Session 1974/75, p.359.

officers.⁵² It was continually reiterated by the government that more locals were not recruited because: "... applicants have the necessary academic qualifications, but seem rather limited in their outlook, show little knowledge or interest in public affairs and do not display the qualities of character and intelligence needed in an administrative officer".⁵³ A more objective judgement on the issue is provided by Miron Mushkat when he wrote: "A more subtle explanation for the extent of expatriate recruitment is that it dovetails with the higher objective of 'colonial control' ".⁵⁴

It was this objective of colonial control that prevented the colonial authorities from allowing any far-reaching constitutional reforms in the colony. While there was truth in the British and Hong Kong Government's argument that China would object to more representative government their primary motivation was to retain colonial autocratic control. To maintain this stability the colonial government saw it as essential to deny the people of Hong Kong the right to participate in the running of the colony. By co-option of local elites and the emasculation of potential political arenas the Hong Kong Government successfully created a situation in which people were discouraged from exercising their right to vote and which discouraged the forming of a national identity. In this way proponents of the status quo were able to point to the apparent apathy of the Hong Kong people as a reason for the lack of constitutional reform.

The government was condemning locals because of their lack of interest in public affairs, which was in itself highly disputable, but it was notable that the education system put in place by the government did not encourage such interest. As reported in a Chinese language newspaper, *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, "This [education] system inhibits students from taking interest in social, political and economic affairs and discourages them from participation in international issues".⁵⁵ During the 1970s the education system continued to be a thorn in the government's side. It appears that few people were happy with the education system as it stood, focusing on examinations and rote learning.⁵⁶ Little had really changed since the 1960s.

⁵² See England, p.269 & The Colonial Secretary, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 22 January 1975, Session 1974/75, p359.

⁵³ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.108-109.

⁵⁴ Miron Mushkat, *The Making of the Hong Kong Administrative Class* (Hong Kong, 1982), p.60.

⁵⁵ Translated in *SCMP*, 9 September 1972, p.2.

⁵⁶ See *SCMP*, 4 February 1972, p.11; 11 January 1972, p.6.

Free universal primary education had only become a reality in 1971, but universal free secondary schooling was still not available. There were frequent calls for the abolition of the Secondary School Entrance examination but due to the lack of places available in schools the government saw this as impossible. The only assurance the public could get was a statement that: "... it will be possible to achieve an interim target of 3 years post-primary education for 50 per cent of children in the 12 to 14 age group by 1976".⁵⁷ The colonial government's former policy of non-intervention had finally caught up with it. The lack of secondary school places highlighted the government's lack of future planning and therefore disregard for the education of its colonial subjects. The issue of providing adequate secondary school places and a more enlightened form of education became a major test of the colonial government's supposed dedication to the people of Hong Kong.

The government did rise to the challenge and in 1973 produced a Green Paper on education which was produced for examination by the public and was to provide feed back to the government. "This was the first Green Paper ever published in Hong Kong. It might be interpreted as a government response to the general public's demand for participation and involvement in the formulation of social policies".⁵⁸ The Governor had decided that with no chance to participate in the political process, the public had to be given another form of participation in the running of the colony, otherwise calls for political reform would strengthen and the status quo would be threatened. The White Paper on education published in 1974 did take into account public views, including providing three years universal secondary education by 1979, a move that prompted a Legislative Councillor to comment: "We are most satisfied as government's acceptance of this proposal reflects that the government is democratic and takes public opinion into consideration".⁵⁹ In this way the colonial government was able to show the people of Hong Kong that their views were taken into account while at the same time bolstering its image and thereby maintaining stability. This was another example of the colonial government's giving way to public pressure in order to fulfil its own agenda, which was to dissipate political agitation without any loss of colonial control. It would appear again that without this public

⁵⁷ Mr Canning, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 15 November 1972, Session 1972/73, p.139.

⁵⁸ Fung Yee-wang, 'Education', in *Hong Kong in Transition*, pp.305-306.

⁵⁹ Mr Wang, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 October 1974, Session 1974/74, p.53.

pressure, from a supposedly apathetic population, little would have been done.

Murray MacLehose's governorship also saw many reforms in the area of labour relations. The riots of 1966/67 had provided the impetus for such reform in order to prevent a repetition of these riots, but these efforts had been piecemeal. From 1972 reforms relating to sick leave, holiday pay and holidays were enacted, but it was a statement of how far behind the rest of the industrial world Hong Kong was when the Governor announced in 1976 that "... from 1978 ... the minimum holiday entitlements would be extended by one week with pay. There would also be a mandatory one day of rest per week".⁶⁰ One important piece of legislation was the Labour Relations Bill 1975.⁶¹ This bill set out to replace the archaic Illegal Strikes and Lock-outs Ordinance that had been extended every year probably since its inception in 1927.⁶² The use of this Ordinance showed that the colonial authorities were aware of the very real possibility of labour disputes and that they were determined to keep a tight reign on such issues. The Ordinance imposed, in England's words, "A ... crushing limitation [on the right to strike]," and one of its purposes was "... to prohibit political strikes".⁶³ The very real fear of the colonial government of political agitation was exemplified by this Ordinance. It is important to note that the Labour Relations Bill retained many of the features of this Ordinance, that is the right to strike remained very ambiguous.

Despite harsh laws against strikes these did frequently take place.⁶⁴ 1973 saw many industrial disputes and it was observed that "... industrial strife had hit a peak not reached since the politically motivated strikes of 1967. This contrasted greatly with an assurance given later in the year to Singapore businessmen by the Financial Secretary, Philip Haddon-Cave, that Hongkong was 'virtually strike-free' ".⁶⁵ The colonial government wanted investors to believe that Hong Kong was a little island of industrial harmony and huge profit. It was, of course to the government's advantage

⁶⁰ *Asia 1977 Yearbook*, p.162.

⁶¹ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 7 May 1975, Session 1974/75, pp.750-755; 16 July 1975, Session 1974/75, pp.918-930.

⁶² For example see *Hong Kong Hansard* 13 December 1972, Session 1972, p.253; 18 December 1974, Session 1974/75, p.296.

⁶³ England, p.242.

⁶⁴ See *SCMP*, 7 April 1972, p.1; 15 April 1972, p.6; 2 May 1972, p.5.

⁶⁵ *Asia 1974 Yearbook*, p.144.

that the Union movement in Hong Kong was known to be fragmented.⁶⁶ Trade Unions were small and disunited, partially because of political ideology influenced by mainland politics (pro-nationalist or pro-communist) but also because of government legislation that hindered the forming of a strong trade union movement. This was a conscious effort on the part of the colonial authorities, whose agenda in introducing reforms was astutely spelt out by a Legislative Councillor: "Government's timely moves in introducing labour and social reforms has made a strong labour movement less necessary. A strong labour movement may lead to political agitations which are undesirable in the circumstances of Hong Kong".⁶⁷

The main, or most obvious, area of social reform, other than education, was in social welfare. As stated in the *Asia 1974 Yearbook*: "The colony acquired a programme which, for the first time in its history, passed beyond day-to-day problems ...".⁶⁸ A new plan for social welfare was drafted in a White Paper entitled 'Social Welfare in Hong Kong: The Way Ahead', which proposed reforms such as cash assistance and provision of facilities to the severely disabled and elderly, expansion of recreational facilities, and training of social workers.⁶⁹ To maintain its legitimacy, the colonial government, after the turmoil of the late 1960s, had little choice but to expand its involvement in the welfare of Hong Kong's population. With little hope of determining their own future, the people of Hong Kong had to be given some reassurances that the government was willing to listen to and act upon their needs. The colonial government astutely put across this image of itself, as concerned with social welfare issues. Yet, again, the government's commitment was more impressive in theory than in reality:

In his second attempt at budgeting, my honourable Friend the Financial Secretary has produced one which has been acclaimed as a 'happy budget' because it heralds increased social welfare boosting its provision to 2.4 per cent of the total expenditure, which my honourable Friend considered an improvement over the 2.3 per cent for this year.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Dr Chung, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 November 1972, Session 1972/73, p.79.

⁶⁷ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 28 October 1976, Session 1976/77, p.135.

⁶⁸ *Asia 1974 Yearbook*, p.143.

⁶⁹ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 18 October 1972, Session 1972, p.12-15.

⁷⁰ Mr Szeto, *Hong Kong Hansard* 14, March 1973, Session 1972/73, p.535.

The object of Sir Murray MacLehose's governorship was to preserve the political status quo of autocratic rule in the colony in preparation for its return to China. The turmoil of 1966/67 had made it clear that the colonial government could no longer remain distanced from the welfare of the people of Hong Kong, Sir Murray therefore instituted a programme of social reforms that was designed to give the people of Hong Kong a sense that the government was aware of, and willing to listen to, their needs and aspirations. Political reform was an issue that the government consciously avoided. Any reforms made were made grudgingly and not without conditions. Also none of these reforms in any way altered the basic constitutional framework of the colony. Social reforms were a trade off for political reform, in an effort to maintain stability and quell calls for political reform. The major test for MacLehose's government was the Godber corruption scandal. Government's response to this crisis showed that if threatened the colonial government would succumb to public pressure to restore its legitimacy. This incident also showed that the people of Hong Kong were not at all apathetic to social and political issues within the colony. The creation of the ICAC was a political move designed to diffuse an intense political situation. The government was however still not fully in touch with the people of the colony, a fact that was to have major ramifications in the latter half of Sir Murray's governorship.

CHAPTER FIVE

CRISIS, ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Increasing demands from the people of Hong Kong for more representative and accountable government characterised the latter half of Sir Murray MacLehose's governorship, from the years 1977 to 1982. The issues of lack of localisation (the appointing of locals to the civil service) in the administration, social welfare, labour and educational reforms continued to be a problem for the colonial authorities. Social reform remained the main goal of the government as an attempt to pacify the population and therefore maintain the political status quo and stability of the colony. However, these reforms were no longer sufficient to deter the people of Hong Kong from demanding more say in the government of their home. This situation had arisen due to the government's failure to close the gap of communication between itself and the people. To quell these calls for political reform the colonial government conceded certain administrative reforms that did not fundamentally alter the status quo. Coupled with rising demands for greater participation was the issue of the future of the colony. Relations between the governments of China, Britain and Hong Kong became increasingly convivial making it clear that negotiations over Hong Kong's future status were imminent. Maintenance of the political situation was therefore Sir Murray's prime objective. The granting of an amnesty to the corrupt members of the police force after the police mutiny of 1977 was testimony to the length to which the government would go to maintain this status quo.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was Sir Murray's pet project. Corruption was an issue habitually ignored by previous administrations and the tackling of this 'evil' was one of the aims of his administration. The ICAC had been increasing its enquires into corruption in the civil service and the police force had come under close scrutiny; "By the end of October, about 80 people, mostly policemen, were on the ICAC's wanted list".¹ Regarding the ICAC Sir Murray stated in the Legco that: "It is particularly significant and satisfactory to see that in the

¹ Raymond Yao, 'Law and Disorder', *FEER*, 11 November 1977, p.9.

Commissioners annual report he lists as one of three factors which have ensured success the co-operation of the Police Force".² It appeared therefore to come as a complete shock to the colonial government when, on 28 October 1977, thousands of police men staged massive protests against the ICAC and a splinter group stormed the ICAC headquarters. The police had felt victimised by the ICAC and discontent had been brewing for a long time. That the government did not realise the possibility of impending trouble highlighted the continuing lack of communication between the people and the government. If the colonial authorities had realised the extent of dissatisfaction within the police force it was likely that they chose to ignore the situation in the hope that it would disappear as had happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the issue of corruption.

However this was a situation that was not going to disappear. "This demonstration was followed by threats to begin a progressive refusal to enforce the law unless the powers of the I.C.A.C. were drastically curtailed".³ As stated previously the role of the police force in maintaining the status quo and political stability of the colony was essential to the colonial administration of Hong Kong. T. Wing Lo referred to this interdependence as "... the sophisticated relationship between the colonial state and its 'reserve army' ".⁴ The police served as deterrents to political agitation as well as enforcers of law and order. To lose their support would have almost certainly spell the end of the colonial state. As it was MacLehose's mission to preserve the status quo in preparation for Hong Kong's return to China this was a situation that demanded immediate attention and swift action. The police understood their importance as a potential power bloc in the colony and the Governor's reaction to their demands proved that when push came to shove the colonial authorities would do all they could to preserve the benevolent autocracy of the colonial regime.

The Governor, in dealing with this crisis of legitimacy, made use of his ultimate power to take a unilateral decision without consulting either the Exco or the Legco.⁵ On 7 November 1977 the Governor stated in the Legco:

² H.E. the Governor, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 5 October 1977, Session 1977/78 (5 October 1977 - 6 August 1978), p.16.

³ Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.111.

⁴ T. Wing Lo, p.88.

⁵ See Raymond Yao, 'Quiet, but not forgotten', *FEER*, 25 November 1977, p.30.

On Saturday evening [5 November 1977] I announced a new policy with regard to ICAC operations. I did say in the following terms: 'all concerned may take it that as from now the ICAC will not normally act on complaints or evidence relating to offences committed before 1 January 1977 except in relation to persons who have been interviewed, persons against whom warrants have been issued, and persons outside Hong Kong'.⁶

The near mutiny of the Hong Kong Police Force had forced the colonial government to admit its weakness and succumb to the pressure of what was, basically, blackmail. This was a high price to pay for the maintenance of the status quo. The *Times* reported that the Governor had announced "... a surrender to the forces of corruption", and that the announcement had "... provoked angry reactions from the public, community leaders and the English-language and Chinese press".⁷ This amnesty made a mockery of the war against corruption and seriously undermined the government's credibility. One issue again forced into the limelight through this incident was the government's lack of commitment to its policy of localisation in the higher levels of the civil service.

That the government could be so oblivious to the simmering discontent within the police force was evidence of a lack of communication, a situation, critics argued, symptomatic of the lack of local promotion within the civil service. Essentially this was a lack of communication. One Legislative Councillor asked: "Why is it that with so much being said about localization, so little has been done to localize the top level of the Civil Service Branch where leadership, communication and understanding are so vital to good staff management and hence Government"?⁸ The Secretary for the Civil Service, in 1978, replied to these critics that: "I am certain that the public at large expects us to find the necessary staff, and accepts overseas recruitment is necessary at the present time ...".⁹ This statement was ludicrous considering that the colonial authorities had continuously reiterated that they had been following a policy of localisation for many years. While the more junior posts were substantially localised the senior posts as in the

⁶ H.E. the Governor, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 7 November 1977, Session 1977/78, p.157.

⁷ *Times*, 31 January 1978, p.19; 7 November 1977, p.6.

⁸ Mr Lobo, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 29 March 1978, Session 1977/78, p.654. An Editorial in the *FEER* stated: "Perhaps one of the Governor's failures has been the unforgivably slow pace of 'localisation' and the lack of a conscious effort to identify and promote many talented Chinese still in the middle ranks of the bureaucracy", *FEER*, 18 November 1977, p.21.

⁹ Secretary for the Civil Service, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 13 April 1978, Session 1977/78, p.784.

1960s and early 1970s continued to be almost completely filled by expatriates. The excuse for this was that China would not like more locals in important positions within the civil service, yet as the Hong Kong Observers¹⁰ pointed out: "The Government is only *guessing* that China would not like more Hongkong Chinese in decision-making positions. And try as we might, we fail to see how more locals in decision-making positions in the Government could possibly constitute 'de-stabilisation' ".¹¹

The reason for the policy of appointing expatriates at senior levels was not so much to placate China or arising from fear of instability or even that there were no suitable local candidates; such appointments were a tool by which the colonial government retained its hegemony over the colony. Without local Hong Kong people in important decision making roles ultimate control of the colony continued to lie in the hands of a few expatriate officers, amounting to foreign rule; "... the gap that exists between Government and people in most places is widened in Hongkong because so many officials do not speak the language of the people and do not identify with them".¹² The people of Hong Kong still had no effective means of influencing the government and its decisions.

A 'Hongkong believer' can have no sense of participating in the running of his own city. Efforts to paste a human veneer over the ruling bureaucracy have been in vain. Whenever he has any contact with the Mandarinate, the Hongkong resident is reminded that he is ruled by a body of men who are in no way accountable to the people on whose daily lives they increasingly impinge and that a depressingly large number of them have an inflated sense of their own abilities and importance.¹³

While this was the case, the infamous gap, which the colonial government had theoretically attempted to resolve, could never be bridged.

¹⁰ The Hong Kong Observers are a pressure group of local born Hong Kong people formed in 1975. Their aim is to "... help foster a climate in which a well-informed public can intelligently discuss issues of common concern [and] to persuade the Government to be more responsive to the needs of the people [of Hong Kong]", Hong Kong Observers, 'Hong Kong Observers Forum, 21 March 1977', *Pressure Points. A Social Critique by the Hong Kong Observers* (Hong Kong, 1981), p.1.

¹¹ Hong Kong Observers, 'A realistic look at localisation, 15 October 1980', in *ibid.*, p.31.

¹² Hong Kong Observers, 'Closing the communication gap, 26 December 1977', in *ibid.*, p.85.

¹³ Derek Davies, 'Traveller's Tales', *FEER*, 7 July 1978, p.17.

An incident that clearly showed the government's ability to act immediately and without consultation when its power was threatened was the Precious Blood Golden Jubilee School incident. Students and teachers at the school staged peaceful sit-ins and boycotts of classes in protest at the mismanagement of school funds. As we have seen in earlier chapters the colonial government was very concerned to suppress political activity in the education sector. This led the Education Department to shut down the school on 14 May 1978. "Some 500 students - half the school's population - had precipitated what the department described as a 'dangerous' situation by publicly questioning the running of the school".¹⁴ Rather than examining the causes of the dispute the government simply closed the school down and attempted to direct public attention against the teachers; "... the authorities said the 'misguided behaviour' of the teenagers was instigated by radical, 'power-hungry' teachers".¹⁵ This was a typical response from a government that, having no mandate from the people, was highly sensitive to criticism. Those who criticised the authorities were immediately labelled radicals or leftists. The government's decision in this case provoked strong reaction from the public when 7,000 people attended a rally demanding the school be reopened.¹⁶

The colonial government was extremely sensitive to criticism, as the *Hong Kong Observers* commented: "Although on the one hand the Government criticises the public for being apathetic, on the other hand it seems to find dissent almost intolerable, and any signs of non-conformist thinking must be snuffed out".¹⁷ An incident concerning a group of squatters in 1979 provided further evidence that the government was intolerant of public displays of criticism. A group of squatters, including children, were arrested for unlawful assembly on their way to petition the Governor (an accepted form of redress in Hong Kong), under the Public Order Ordinance. This incident highlighted the wide ranging powers the Ordinance gave to the police, which critics argued was an intolerable infringement on civil rights. Mrs Elsie Elliott made an astute observation when she remarked: "Of course, this law was not used when thousands of police threatened law and

¹⁴ Mary Lee, 'School that was taught a lesson', *ibid.*, 26 May 1978, p.30.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.31.

¹⁶ See Mary Lee, 'For whom the school bell tolls', *ibid.*, 23 June 1978, p.34.

¹⁷ *Hong Kong Observers*, 'If Topley has evidence of wrongdoing, let's see it, 18 July 1977', in *Pressure Points*, p.50.

order in the colony in October 1977".¹⁸ The use of this Ordinance in the above situation was essentially a display of the government's power, a not-so-subtle reminder that to act in a way that displeased the government might lead to arrest and conviction.

The ensuing debate in the Legco and newspapers over civil rights, and public pressure eventually forced the government to amend the Public Order Ordinance.¹⁹ Essentially the amendment redefined a lawful meeting as one of not more than 30 people, but it did not reduce the police's power to intervene in such assemblies if they 'looked' as if they 'might' become unruly.²⁰ The government had followed its traditional pattern of giving in only as much as was sufficient to placate the public while still retaining the control they had previously possessed essentially intact. The late 1970s saw increased agitation from the public in the field of social issues; "... by the late 1970s ... two new, politically charged revolutions ... were getting underway, one economic and the other educational and social".²¹ The Precious Blood School protest and squatter protest are examples of this. With the stability of Hong Kong and the maintenance of the status quo as the overriding objective of the government social issues (which were by virtue of the political set up potential destabilising political issues) continued to be a main focus of government policy. The later 1970s saw an abundance of Green and White papers in the fields of social welfare, housing, labour and education.

Social welfare was arguably the least important of these reforms. Though improvements were made to social welfare provisions for the elderly, youth and unemployed, social welfare spending continued to amount to only around five per cent of the budget.²² The colonial government had not quite given up its traditional hands-off policy in this field. The overriding

¹⁸ *Asia 1980 Yearbook*, p.171.

¹⁹ See Hodge, p.481.

²⁰ See Public Order (Amendment) Bill, 23 July 1980, *Hong Kong Hansard*, Session 1979/80 (10 October 1979 - 6 August 1980), pp.1064-1068; 3 December 1980, *Hong Kong Hansard*, Session 1980/81 (1 October 1980 - 30 July 1981), pp.251-253.

²¹ Christopher Howe, 'Thirty Years of Sino-British Relations: A Foreign Office View', *China Quarterly*, 139(1994), p.797.

²² See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 1 March 1978, Session 1977/78, p.528; Felix Patrikeeff, *Mouldering Pearl. Hong Kong at the Cross Roads* (London, 1989), p.71; Miss Ko, "I welcome the high priority given to the expansion of social services In view of the development programmes which have either been approved or are going to be approved, the level of expenditure on social services is still far short of what is needed," *Hong Kong Hansard*, 29 March 1978, Session 1977/78, p.684.

emphasis in Hong Kong was on making money, working hard and being rewarded for doing so. A welfare state was anathema to these principles and something that Hong Kong should avoid at all costs. With an emphasis of hard work important labour reforms were enacted, such as one day off per week, one week annual leave, sickness pay and, in 1981, paid maternity leave.²³ However these reforms had little effect on monetary benefits for workers; as a Legislative Councillor observed in 1982: "The fact that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening shows that the workers, on whom Hong Kong depends, are not getting a fair share of the economic cake".²⁴ Despite this widening gap between rich and poor a better educated middle class was emerging and with it came increased social expectations.

The rising social expectations of the Hong Kong public continued to be a source of concern for the colonial administration. This was especially true in the field of education. In 1978 free universal junior secondary education was implemented,²⁵ but again this highlighted the inadequacies of the schooling system. The Secondary School Entrance examination was abolished in 1978, but was replaced with another test, the Academic Aptitude Test. This meant that though all children had the opportunity to attend secondary school those with the best marks on the test were able to attend the best schools while those who did not do well would have to attend lower quality schools. The government's attitude towards education caused agitation, especially among students.²⁶ The issue was one of quality against quantity. Critics accused the government of neglecting the quality of education in their effort to increase the quantity of schools, an accusation that they categorically denied.²⁷ At this time at least half of the population was under 25 and had been born in Hong Kong, and with them had grown a rising sense of nationalism. They demanded a better way of life in Hong Kong; better education, better housing, better labour conditions and most importantly more participation into the administration of the colony.

²³ See 'The labour rights that workers know nothing of', *FEER*, 24 March 1978, pp.53-54; 'Employment (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 1981', *Hong Kong Hansard*, 29 April 1981, Session 1980/81, pp.819-821.

²⁴ Mr So, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 25 March 1982, Session 1981/82 (7 October 1981 - 28 July 1982), p.621.

²⁵ See *ibid*, 5 October 1977, Session 1977/78, p.26; 10 October 1979, Session 1979/80, p.33.

²⁶ See Mary Lee, 'Studies in Discontent', *FEER*, 24 March 1978, p.34.

²⁷ Director of Education, "Much attention is given in the Green Paper to improving the quality of secondary education and making it suitable to current and future needs", *Hong Kong Hansard*, 9 November 1977, Session 1977/78, p.175.

Government policies had never been directed toward instilling a national pride in Hong Kong. As a prominent Hong Kong sociologist, Dr Cheung Tak-sing, said of government policies: "Most policies have been designed and implemented in an ad hoc manner ... the cultivation of a sense of belonging among its people ... is not its primary concern".²⁸ This was in contrast to initiatives in Singapore where the establishment of a Singaporean national identity had a high priority after Singapore became independent. While the Singapore Government saw nationalism as fundamental to the political future of their state the Hong Kong Government saw the growth of a nationalist movement as a threat to the colonial regime. The growth of Hong Kong nationalism despite government opposition highlighted that the problem still remained of the lack of communication between the government and the people and the lack of accountability of the government. By the late 1970s the colonial government still insisted that the views of the people of Hong Kong were taken fully into account,²⁹ but while this may have been what the authorities wanted to believe, it simply was not the reality.

As I have argued the people of Hong Kong were never apathetic but they did not generally rock the boat too much unless a situation became intolerable. This is what was happening in the late 1970s. The governor of the colony had promised more consultative government. The people of Hong Kong saw this promise as unfulfilled, hence the growing tide of agitation against the government:

People without any say in policy-making are no longer a silent majority. Commuters, tenants, squatters and - more recently - schoolchildren, parents and some teachers are all expressing their views, forming a message which is becoming increasingly clearer to officialdom: that they have a right to be consulted, and are in fact demanding that they be heard.³⁰

The colonial administration, in response to growing public criticism, published a Green Paper on the future of District Administration in 1980. This paper proposed the forming of 16 District Boards throughout the colony by 1982 that would have a directly elected element to them. The *Asia 1981*

²⁸ Mary Lee, 'A spiral of interest in homes', *FEER*, 14 December 1979, p.29.

²⁹ Secretary for Home Affairs, "... the opinion of the majority of the community, and not just that of outspoken individuals or affected groups, has always been taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of policies", *Hong Kong Hansard*, 15 November 1979, Session 1979/80, p.207.

³⁰ Mary Lee, 'Shouting to be heard', *FEER*, 4 August 1978, p.20.

Yearbook reported: "Reading between the lines of the green paper, it was clear that development of Hongkong's so-called government by consultation was trailing rising expectations and social development".³¹ The most important provision of this proposal was the introduction of a universal franchise for virtually everyone over 21 who had been resident in Hong Kong for seven years. When, in 1981 the White Paper on District Administration was published it was the first time in Hong Kong's history, that the people of Hong Kong could elect their own representatives under a universal franchise. As one Legislative Councillor commented:

Sir, the publication of the White Paper on District Administration represents a milestone in the administrative history of Hong Kong. It confirms the Government's convictions and commitment towards greater participation by the inhabitants of each district and towards better co-ordination of, and responsiveness by, the administration.³²

The colonial government had little choice but to give the people of Hong Kong a greater say in the running of the colony; the people had demanded it. Yet, as always with the Hong Kong Government, the reality was less far-reaching than the theory.

While it was commendable to extend to the population of Hong Kong a universal franchise, the colonial government could not bring itself to loosen its control over the institutions of the colony; "There will be an unofficial majority on the District Boards. The Boards will have a membership of some 25-30 of which approximately one quarter will be officials with the remainder divided more or less equally between elected and nominated or appointed members".³³ These numbers effectively meant that government appointed members would be in the majority. The effectiveness of the District Boards was also dubious because their role was, like other governmental channels of communication, purely advisory. With no executive power and no independent budget the District Boards were completely dependent on the government. "... Government spokesmen ... seem[ed] to be falling over themselves explaining that the proposals for

³¹ *Asia 1981 Yearbook*, pp.137-138.

³² Dr Ho, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 11 February 1981, Session 1980/81, p.397.

³³ The Chief Secretary, *ibid.*, 21 January 1981, Session 1980/81, p.367.

district administration [did] not require constitutional changes".³⁴ The reason given once again was that China would disapprove of any more far-reaching reforms, but it was also the case that the British and Hong Kong Governments did not want such reforms either. As with other concessions the District Boards were a tool to placate the Hong Kong public and in that way to ensure stability and maintain the status quo.

With a universal franchise adopted for the District Boards there could be no argument against the same franchise being accorded to the Urban Council. This step was legislated to take place for the 1983 Urban Council elections.³⁵ However, electoral reform in the Urban Council was a farce. The council was given no greater powers, no majority of elected representatives and so remained politically emasculated. One Hong Kong Chinese man stated in 1981: "I hate to say this, but, judging from the Urban Council election turnouts, the people of Hongkong have not taken to democracy".³⁶ The Urban Council had never been in any way democratic. Voter turn-out was used as a yard stick for apathy; that low turn-out was said to equal apathy. However one of the root causes of low voter turn-out was the lack of true representativeness of the council. The Report on Local Administration published in 1966, that would have led to a rectifying of this situation, had never been implemented and now the District Boards took over the representative role the Urban Council could have had many years ago. It was ostensibly a policy of divide and rule.

Any constitutional changes to the Legco were ruled out, while the government congratulated itself on increasing the number of members in the council, and thereby making it more representative.³⁷ The *Hong Kong Annual Report* stated: "The British Government's policy towards Hong Kong is that there shall be no fundamental constitutional changes for which there is, in any event, little or no popular pressure".³⁸ The crucial words were 'little or no popular pressure'. With these words the British and Hong Kong Governments justified the lack of constitutional reform in Hong Kong. It

³⁴ Hong Kong Observers, 'Making sense of devolution, 9 July 1980', in *Pressure Points*, p.34. Also see *Hong Kong Hansard*, 21 January 1981, Session 1980/81, p.369; Mary Lee, 'Two cheers for democracy' *FEER*, 30 January 1981, p.34.

³⁵ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 24 June 1981, Session 1980/81, p.980.

³⁶ *FEER*, 13 March 1981, p.42.

³⁷ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 5 October 1977, Session 1977/78, p.6; 28 April 1982, Session 1981/82, p.734.

³⁸ *Hong Kong Annual Report*, 1974, p.202; 1977, p.220; *Hong Kong: A Review*, 1979, p.236.

Governments justified the lack of constitutional reform in Hong Kong. It was fair to say that the people of Hong Kong had not agitated for constitutional reform in any serious way, such as rioting and other forms of violent confrontation. But this did not mean that the people of Hong Kong did not want constitutional reform. The colonial government had always publicly equated any calls for constitutional reform with a call for Hong Kong to become completely democratic. This was not the case. The people of Hong Kong merely, and rightly so, wanted more say in the administration of the colony. At this time they were not calling for fully fledged democracy but for more elected representatives to the Legco,³⁹ for the government to be more accessible, representative and accountable.

The government was by now beginning to concede that the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic. Sir Murray stated in 1982: "Unlike their parents, the increasing number of Hongkong-born people are eager to participate in local affairs".⁴⁰ This statement implied that the older generation of Hong Kong people were apathetic to Hong Kong affairs. It negated the many years of calls for social and political reform by these people. To say that they were apathetic was not only misguided but untrue. It was through their efforts that the youth of Hong Kong enjoyed better education, social welfare, and political reform (albeit minimal) so that they were, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, able to take more part in local affairs (again albeit minimal). Political reforms, such as the extension of the franchise and the District Boards, did not in any extensive way change the administration of the colony. The Governor, his officials and big business remained in ultimate control of the colony's political scene. However, the introduction of a universal franchise was to have important implications for the future political development of Hong Kong. As Chris Patton (future reformist Governor of Hong Kong) stated:

History teaches us that an increasingly prosperous and educated people want to be more involved in decisions. Here you have a benign government which has quite deliberately set out to broaden the middle-class base. One expects that this development will have at some point constitutional consequences.⁴¹

³⁹ "A survey of public opinion conducted in 1977 discovered that 50 per cent of those interviewed were in favour of having elected members in the Legislative Council ...", Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.47.

⁴⁰ *Times*, 13 April 1982, p.8.

⁴¹ *FEER*, 13 March 1981, p.66.

The aim of MacLehose's administration was to preserve the political status quo of Hong Kong. That this was the British Government's wish, and that they believed Sir Murray to be the man for the job, was testified to by his term of governorship being extended not less than four times. This was a task he had dealt with effectively and efficiently. The political situation remained one of a benevolent autocracy, despite small administrative reforms within the colony. This emphasis on maintaining the status quo was pre-empted by the knowledge that Britain and China would be in the near future negotiating the future of Hong Kong. It was also arguably a foregone conclusion that Hong Kong in its entirety, including sovereignty and administration, would be returning to China in 1997, when the lease for the New Territories expired.

Hong Kong was of great economic benefit to China, and the Chinese Government was against any moves that might upset the stability and therefore the economy of Hong Kong; "A senior Chinese Government official in Peking has again emphasized that Britain, Hongkong and China 'must maintain the present status quo to their mutual benefit' ".⁴²

The late 1970s saw a growing rapprochement between the British and Chinese Governments, and between China and Hong Kong. It was one of the major objectives of Sir Murray's administration to cultivate this relationship. Through cordial relations it was hoped that a satisfactory solution to the Hong Kong problem could be found. Sir Murray, in 1979, became the first Governor of Hong Kong to officially visit China. One of the main reasons for his visit was to discuss the future of Hong Kong. During this visit Deng Xiaoping (China's Senior Vice-Premier) "... privately made it clear that China intended to resume sovereignty at the expiry of the lease".⁴³ This formed the beginning of increasing contacts between China and Hong Kong.⁴⁴ Apart from official contacts there was a rapid growth in China-Hong Kong trade and joint business ventures that saw their economies become increasingly intertwined.⁴⁵ The ever-expanding links between China and

⁴² *Times*, 17 January 1980, p.9.

⁴³ Welsh, p.504.

⁴⁴ See *Asia 1981 Yearbook*, p.132.

⁴⁵ for example, "By 1978, Chinese investment in Hong Kong was of the order of Hong Kong \$11 billion", Peter Harris, *Political China Observed* (London, 1980), p.210; & "The dominant source of external investment in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone [located next to the New Territories, one of four Special Economic zones established in China post-1976 to promote economic growth] is Hong Kong ...", Ian Kelly, *Hong Kong. A Political-Geographic Analysis* (London 1987), p.89.

Hong Kong and cordiality between China and Britain were evidence that Hong Kong was progressively being reintegrated into mainland China. This situation was also evidenced by the fact that while links between China and Hong Kong were becoming stronger the British Government continued to minimise its commitment to the colony.

One controversial piece of British legislation that reinforced the feeling that the British Government was weakening its links with the colony was the 1981 'British Nationality Act'. Under this Act, Hong Kong British passport holders became 'British Dependent Territory Citizens', which deprived them of the right of entry to, or abode in, Britain. This move caused great concern among the Hong Kong people who saw themselves as relegated to second-class citizens. Further salt was rubbed into the wound when, after the defeat of a proposed amendment to the Bill in favour of Hong Kong,⁴⁶ the House of Lords accepted an amendment to give the people of Gibraltar full British citizenship (which had also been accorded to residents of the Falkland islands). This amendment effectively discriminated against the people of Hong Kong and prompted great agitation in Hong Kong and charges of racism towards the British Government.⁴⁷ Despite the British Government's claims to maintaining a strong commitment to the colony,⁴⁸ it was obvious that it was distancing itself from Hong Kong. Frank Welsh summed the situation up perfectly:

Cynics - and it is difficult not to be at least sceptical about the purity of British motives - noted that one essential preliminary to disposing of the Hong Kong problem had been hastened out of the way Should negotiations with China fail and conditions in Hong Kong become intolerable, at least Britain would not be plagued by some 3.3 million Chinese demanding to live there.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See *Hong Kong Hansard*, 28 October 1981, Session 1981/82, p.103.

⁴⁷ For example, "... Sir Yuet Keung Kan, a member of the Legislative Council and Chairman of the Hongkong Development Council, attributed the Lords vote to the fact 'that, unlike the people of Gibraltar, the people of Hongkong are non-white' ", *Times*, 25 July 1981, p.6. For a fuller account of this discrimination see *Asia 1982 Yearbook*, p.147; Slinn., pp.15-16; Welsh, p.506.

⁴⁸ "The British Nationality Bill does not affect Her Majesty's Government's relationship with Hong Kong or the strength of the Government's support for that or any other dependent territory", 'Appendix II, Text of Written Reply by the Home Secretary, the Rt. Hon. William Whitelaw, to Sir Paul Bryan's Speech of 27 October 1981', *Hong Kong Hansard*, 11 November 1981, Session 1981/82, pp.190-191. For Sir Paul Bryan's speech see *ibid*, pp.189-190.

⁴⁹ Welsh, p.506.

The scene was beginning to be set for the eventual retrocession of Hong Kong to China, an eventuality in which the Hong Kong people were to have little say.

The future of Hong Kong by the early 1980s had become a subject of much concern and debate among the people. A Legislative Councillor stated: "This is a delicate subject, but not one to be avoided and I feel bound to say this: emphasis on the tripartite relationship between China, Hong Kong and Britain, sometimes tends to overlook that it is the future of this community of 5 million people and more which is at stake".⁵⁰ This was the real issue: it was the future of Hong Kong's people that was at stake and the question was would they be allowed to play any part in deciding their future? The debate over Hong Kong's future was to be a test of the commitment of the Hong Kong Government to its avowed intention of government by consultation and consensus. It was also to be a test of the British Government's support of this policy. Hua Guofeng (the Chinese Premier) made this statement on 7 October 1979: "... through negotiations, a satisfactory way can be sought to settle the question of Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories".⁵¹ It was clear that this meant negotiation with Britain and it was obvious to interested parties that these negotiations would not involve the people of Hong Kong.⁵² Hong Kong would return to China in 1997 and nothing could be allowed to alter this fact.

The objective of Sir Murray MacLehose, to maintain the political status quo in Hong Kong, was a task that he handled with skill and success. The great crisis of legitimacy brought about by the police mutiny and Sir Murray's subsequent concessions to the police showed that he was committed to maintaining this status quo. Social reforms were an important aspect of this policy but because the colonial government had failed to close the infamous gap between itself and the people, social reforms on their own were no longer adequate to quell calls for political reform. Even increased agitation for political reform, which showed that the people of Hong Kong were not at all apathetic, did not see Sir Murray deviate from his objective. With the people of Hong Kong becoming more vocal in their demands for participation in government, Sir Murray, was not able to ignore

⁵⁰ Mr Chen, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 31 October 1979, Session 1979/1980, p.107.

⁵¹ Joseph Y.S. Cheng (ed), *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future* (Oxford, 1984), p.2.

⁵² See Miners, 'China and Hong Kong's future', in *Hong Kong. Dilemmas of Growth*, pp.14-15; Miners, *Government and Politics*, p.7.

these demands, so he made political concessions that appeared to give the people more say. But these concessions did not in any way alter the constitutional situation of the colony. At the end of his governorship Sir Murray had achieved his goal of maintaining the status quo and of cultivating a congenial relationship with China. The increasingly friendly relationship between Britain and China made the question of Hong Kong's future a leading issue, a future that became increasingly clear with the appointment of Sir Edward Youde as Governor in 1982.

CHAPTER SIX

SINO-BRITISH NEGOTIATIONS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The question of Hong Kong's future dominated the years 1982-1985. A new Governor, Sir Edward Youde, who arrived in May 1982, brought with him an agenda to deal with the question of Hong Kong's future relationship with China. Negotiations between China and Britain on the future of Hong Kong began in 1982. These negotiations lasted until 1984 when the two parties reached an agreement by which Hong Kong in its entirety would return to China in 1997. The people of Hong Kong had no say in this decision; throughout the negotiations there was no consultation with them and their only chance to put forward their views came after the completion of the Agreement, which was not open to amendment. The Chinese Government had made a statement that they wished the Hong Kong people to administer Hong Kong after 1997. This prompted increased agitation from the Hong Kong people for more representation in their government. Now that the British and Hong Kong Governments could no longer use the excuse that China would be against this they finally considered some form of constitutional reform.

As a result the first elections to the Legco took place in 1985, but they were indirect elections for a minority of members and were therefore only a small step in constitutional reform. While these elections were a milestone in Hong Kong's constitutional history, they were not truly democratic and did not make the Legco much more representative of the Hong Kong people at large. These constitutional reforms merely gave the semblance of democracy. They were designed to show the international community that the people of Hong Kong were being given a say in the administration of the colony and to placate the people of Hong Kong by giving them an ostensibly more representative government. The British and Hong Kong Governments had never been serious about democratising Hong Kong, as was shown by events in 1988 and 1991.

While Sir Murray MacLehose's governorship aimed at maintaining the political and economic stability of the colony, Sir Edward Youde's

governorship was mainly directed toward relations with China rather than on internal Hong Kong issues. Sir Edward Youde was a career diplomat and had served in China several times, his last posting as British Ambassador to Beijing from 1974 to 1978.¹ As the Foreign Office's top expert on China, it was clear that Youde's appointment as Governor anticipated negotiations with China on the future of Hong Kong. "The arrival of the new Governor, Sir Edward Youde, in Hong Kong in May 1982 indicated that Beijing and London were about to negotiate on Hong Kong's future".² Sir Edward confirmed this when, arriving in Hong Kong, he indicated that "... diplomatic exchanges on the colony's future after 1997 had already taken place".³ The negotiations between Britain and China were to dominate the Hong Kong scene for their duration from 1982 to 1984, overshadowing all internal issues of the colony. Youde's aim was also to preserve stability within the colony but the focus of the Governor's attention for the next two years was to be on the joint negotiations between Britain and China.

The Sino-British negotiations on the future status of Hong Kong took place between 1982 and 1984. Secrecy surrounded the negotiations with little information released except the occasional comment that "... meetings to discuss the future of Hong Kong ... are continuing Their agreed aim is the maintenance of the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong".⁴ It was China's stated objective to "... recover the whole of Hong Kong when conditions were ripe ...".⁵ There could therefore be no doubt that the negotiations were working towards an agreement by which Britain would relinquish sovereignty of Hong Kong *and* end their administrative presence in the colony. The obvious and most convenient time for this hand over was at the expiry of the New Territories lease in 1997. The people of Hong Kong were unrepresented at these negotiations. This was not purely at China's insistence; Joseph Cheng states: "It is worth noting, too, that the British government also agrees that ... the settlement of the future of Hong Kong is a strictly bilateral issue between China and Britain".⁶ The Governor, Sir Edward Youde, was a part of the negotiating team, but the Chinese

¹ See *Times*, 21 May 1982, p.11; *FEER*, 25 December 1981, p.10.

² Cheng, *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future*, p.1.

³ *Times*, 21 May 1982, p.11.

⁴ The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Francis Pym), *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 22 December 1982, Volume 34, 1982, p.931.

⁵ *SCMP*, 1 October 1982, p.1.

⁶ Cheng, *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future*, p.9.

Government made it quite clear that he was there as a representative of Britain, and not of Hong Kong.⁷

To counter the lack of representation of the Hong Kong people at the talks, British Government Officials, the Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher, and the Hong Kong Governor, Sir Edward Youde, continually reiterated that "... the views and wishes of the people of Hong Kong will be taken fully into account".⁸ It would have been difficult for these officials to expand on exactly how the people of Hong Kong's views and wishes were taken fully into account. As observed by a commentator at the time:

But how, one may ask, does London know the wishes of the people of Hongkong? Youde added that he shared British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's confidence that such a solution, acceptable to both Britain and China, would be welcomed by the people of Hongkong. Once again, how would he know? there exists no mechanism to enable the authorities to consult the people about such important matters or to give them any voice in their future, which is being decided elsewhere.⁹

The Hong Kong Government's channels of communication for their government by consensus had never been adequate. They had continued to be utilised for the downward flow of information only. Despite the obvious inability of both the Hong Kong and British Governments to secure the views and wishes of the people of Hong Kong, they still continued to claim that this was in fact what they were doing.¹⁰

The governments of Britain and Hong Kong would not concede that they did not in reality know the opinions of the Hong Kong people. Mr Denis Bray, Secretary for Home Affairs, stated: "... the Government undertakes a great deal of press analysis and has the most elaborate systems for talking and listening to the people the Government obtains unexpressed views from the general public through extensive consultative machinery".¹¹ In essence

⁷ *FEER*, 21 July 1983, p12.

⁸ *SCMP*, 10 October 1982, p.11. Also see *Hong Kong Hansard*, 6 October 1982, Session 1982/83 (6 October 1982 - 10 August 1983), p.33; *FEER*, 14 July 1983, p.8.

⁹ Derek Davies & Mary Lee, 'The people without a voice of their own', *FEER*, 22 October 1982, p.44. Also see Welsh, p.510.

¹⁰ "Throughout our negotiations with the Chinese Government, our consultation with the people of Hong Kong has been - and remains - a continuous process", Sir Geoffrey Howe, *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, House of Commons, 16 May 1984, Volume 60, 1984, p.221.

¹¹ *SCMP*, 25 November 1982, p.22.

the Hong Kong Government did not want an independent consultation with the people of Hong Kong on the 1997 issue. Full consultation with the people of Hong Kong could have put into jeopardy the aim and achievements of the negotiations, if it was discovered that they were not acceptable to the people of Hong Kong. All calls for official public opinion surveys and referendums were quickly denounced as a "complete waste of time and a childish exercise".¹² It would have been a complete waste of time given that both the British and Chinese Governments were working to a common agenda with which nothing could be allowed to interfere. Mr John Walden (a former member of the colonial administration) stated: "The British and Hong Kong governments have actively discouraged public discussion of the 1997 question ...".¹³ Consultation was not a high priority of the negotiating teams.

Government shyness with regard to public consultation or referendums may have, in part, been due to the results of public opinion surveys taken by groups within the colony. One survey conducted by the *Hong Kong Observers* in 1982 showed that 95 per cent of the sample found a continuation of the status quo acceptable, with 64 per cent finding British administration under Chinese sovereignty an acceptable solution. This survey also showed that 95 per cent of the people questioned felt that they should be consulted on the future of Hong Kong.¹⁴ To have held a referendum that showed such views would have been an insult to China but the British Government also did not want to take these views into consideration. It was Britain's intention to relinquish the colony to China in 1997; they no longer needed or wanted the colony. A referendum expressing overwhelming preference for the political status quo, that is continued British administration of the colony, would have placed on the British a moral responsibility to the people of Hong Kong that the British Government simply did not wish to have. Even consultation within the colonial government was minimal. The Executive Council was privy to information about the negotiations but there was no official consultation with the Legco at all.

¹² *ibid.*, 8 October 1982, p.18. It was also stated in the British House of Commons that: "We must avoid a referendum", Mr Denis Healy, *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, Volume 60, 1984, p.224.

¹³ *Times*, 22 March 1984, p.13.

¹⁴ Mary Lee, 'The point of no return', *FEER*, 20 August 1982, p.14.

As the negotiations progressed there was growing public discontent at the secrecy of the talks.¹⁵ In response, Umelco (Unofficial Members of the Exco and Legco), in a radical departure from their traditional yes-men role, unanimously passed a resolution calling for a debate on the future of Hong Kong before an agreement was finalised.¹⁶ Umelco sent delegations to both Beijing and London to express the fears and wishes of the Hong Kong people, and in the hope of clarifying issues such as the status of British Dependent Territory passport holders when China took over the colony. Both China and London rejected the Umelco delegation as not representative of the people of Hong Kong; "There was a strong implication [from London] that, as appointed unofficials, they could not claim to represent the people of Hongkong, which is of course exactly what Peking is saying".¹⁷ This was an ironic development considering that Umelco had always been praised by the colonial authorities as an important channel of communication with the people of Hong Kong. Umelco was, as a rule, unrepresentative of the Hong Kong population, but in this instance they were reflecting the feelings of many people in Hong Kong and had their support.¹⁸

Joseph Cheng observed at the time of the negotiations: "... though China and Britain may come to a settlement smoothly through negotiations, the people of Hong Kong will only be informed when all details of the agreement have been finalized".¹⁹ The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong²⁰ was initialled by the two parties on 26 September 1984 and presented to the people of Hong Kong and the world as a *fait accompli*; China would resume sovereignty over, and the administration of, Hong Kong on 1 July 1997. The Legco debates that followed the publication of the Joint Declaration saw all but two Unofficial Legislative Councillors endorse the Agreement.²¹ There were no other choices; either this agreement was

¹⁵ See *Times*, 18 March 1984, p.6.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 15 March 1984, p.7; *FEER*, 29 March 1984, p.18.

¹⁷ Derek Davies, 'Traveller's Tales', *FEER*, 24 May 1984, p.43. Also see *FEER* 24 May 1984, p.44; 31 May 1984, p.17; 5 July 1984, p.11.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 24 May 1984, p.43; Derek Davies, 'An open letter to Sir Geoffrey Howe', *ibid.*, 21 June 1984, pp.40-43.

¹⁹ Cheng, *Hong Kong: In Search of a Future*, p.6.

²⁰ Cmnd. 9352, *A Draft Agreement Between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Future of Hong Kong*, September 1984.

²¹ The two Legislative Councillors who abstained from voting (in the context of Hong Kong politics equal to voting against a motion) were Mr John Swaine and Mr Chan Kam-chuen, see *Hong Kong Hansard*, 15 October 1984, Session 1984/85 (4 October 1984 - 7 August 1985), pp.105-106; 16 October, *ibid.*, pp.109-112. Another member of both the Exco and Legco, Mr

accepted or Hong Kong would face its future with no agreement. If either the British or Hong Kong Governments had been serious about public consultation they would have taken measures to secure the views of the Hong Kong people during the negotiations. Instead, they set up an Assessment Office in Hong Kong immediately after the publication of the Joint Declaration, to measure the public acceptability of the agreement.

The establishment of an office to gauge the acceptability of the agreement was an anomaly in the policy of the British and Hong Kong Governments. In the first place Sir Geoffrey Howe, speaking in the British House of Commons made it clear that: "The normal practice in negotiating international agreements is that, once they have been initialled, they are not open to amendment".²² Given that there could be no amendment to the Declaration, and that it was a foregone conclusion that the British Parliament would endorse the Agreement, the role of the Assessment Office was an exercise in futility. A British Labour MP called it "a farce and a sick joke".²³ The Assessment Office was a face saving measure by the British Government. Allowing the people of Hong Kong to comment on the Agreement would counter potential allegations that the people of Hong Kong had not been consulted on their future. "Officials also agree that the Assessment Office is 'window-dressing for parliament' and serves no useful purpose".²⁴

The finding of the Assessment Office was, not surprisingly, that the people of Hong Kong found the agreement acceptable. Sir Geoffrey Howe stated in the House of Commons debate on Hong Kong: "I am glad to draw the House's attention to the conclusion of the assessment office, endorsed by the monitors, that 'most of the people in Hong Kong find the draft agreement acceptable'. That is an authoritative, and most important, conclusion".²⁵ Yet, the conclusions of the Assessment Office as a mandate for acceptability were questionable at least. The Office had only six weeks to gather its information and in that time just over 1,000 people had made a submission.

Lo, resigned after the official signing of the Joint Declaration in December 1984, see *FEER*, 10 January 1985, p.21.

²² *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 5 December 1984, Volume 69, 1984, p.395.

²³ *FEER*, 25 October 1984, p.19.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 22 November 1984, p.33.

²⁵ *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 5 December 1984, Volume 69, 1984, p.395.

Of these 1,000, 364 people rejected the agreement.²⁶ Mr Denis Healy, in response to Sir Geoffrey's comment, rebutted: "Only 1 individual out of every 3,000 in the territory put in a written submission It is somewhat disturbing that out of the 1,000 people who expressed a view on the acceptability of the agreement, as many as 1 in 3 opposed it".²⁷ Many of those who found the agreement acceptable did so on the understanding that the alternative was to have no agreement at all.²⁸

One part of the Agreement that did satisfy the rising demand for political reform was China's reiteration first stated late in 1982²⁹ that they wanted Hong Kong people to govern Hong Kong after 1997. This policy, while ambiguous, put the British and Hong Kong Governments in a precarious position. The policy of the British Government had always been that constitutional reform in Hong Kong was impossible because of opposition from China. Hong Kong elites had also traditionally opposed the idea of constitutional reform. The mainland government had, during the negotiations, made it clear that Hong Kong would be granted self-administration in 1997. This made the British position appear paternalistic and antiquated. The Chinese Government was prepared to hand the administration of Hong Kong to local people while the colonial authorities had consistently denied local people any such role. The Hong Kong Government had been inexcusably slow in their efforts to appoint local people to the upper echelons of the civil service. The issue only became prominent in the minds of government officials once China had declared her position, and it was only after the signing of the Joint Declaration, in December 1984, that it was announced that: "Hongkong will stop recruiting British civil servants ...".³⁰

This belated effort at localising the civil service, while prompted by the Chinese Government's position, was also due to another agenda. The

²⁶ See *Times*, 30 November 1984, p.6.

²⁷ *British Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], House of Commons*, 5 December 1984, Volume 69, 1984, p.400.

²⁸ For example one person, in their submission to the Assessment Office, wrote: "For the purpose of your statistics you can classify me as one of those who would accept the draft agreement but I hope you will also take into account that I only accept it with much reluctance and with many reservations about the feasibility of its implementation. My heart is not truly at ease and I have no full confidence in our future. The whole thing has not been a very fair play to us because we have not had any say and there is no other alternative other than not to have an agreement at all", *FEER*, 13 December 1984, p.27.

²⁹ See *SCMP*, 21 November 1982, p.5.

³⁰ *Times*, 8 November 1984, p.8.

colonial authorities, before the negotiations, had not felt it necessary to legitimise their regime through more representative government. After the negotiations it was important, for the British Government, that the people of Hong Kong be seen to be playing an important role in the government of the colony to prevent accusations from international observers that they had left Hong Kong with no trained Chinese personal to administer the colony when it returned to China. In light of this the government of Hong Kong could no longer maintain its policy of government by consensus. Pressure from both within the colony and without dictated that some form of constitutional reform giving the people a meaningful part in government was essential. A Hong Kong lobby that went to Britain pointed to polls taken at the time that pointed to 80 per cent of Hong Kong people were in favour of an elected Legco.³¹ The Editor of the *Times* wrote: "Sensible and well-informed people in Hongkong are now calling for a form of democracy to replace the present colonial system of government there".³² These 'sensible and well-informed' people had been calling for more representative government for many years.

After years of ignoring and neglecting the question of constitutional reform for a more democratic and representative administration, only after 1984 did the British and Hong Kong Governments give thought to such reform. British moves toward a more representative and democratic government were not due to any moral commitment felt by the British Government to Hong Kong; calls for such reform had always been quickly dismissed. It was a measure designed to show the world that the people of Hong Kong were not being abandoned to an unknown future with China; that they would have a say in their fate. Norman Miners states, almost apologetically: "Although the British Government was unable to allow the Hong Kong people to exercise any right of self-determination it still made a belated effort to install a democratic constitution before quitting the colony".³³ For international purposes alone, as Frank Welsh states: "... if Hong Kong was to be handed back it must not be as a colony, but as near to an independent state as might conveniently be contrived, and in a condition that did credit to its previous owners".³⁴ The British position was clear; it was perfectly acceptable for Hong Kong to be ruled by a benevolent British autocracy but not by a similar Chinese regime.

³¹ *ibid.*, 9 May 1984, p.7.

³² *ibid.*, 24 February 1984, p.13.

³³ Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Oxford, 5th ed, 1991), p.25.

³⁴ Welsh, pp.474-475.

A Green Paper discussing the introduction of representative government was published on 18 July 1984, followed by the publication of a White Paper entitled *The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong* in November 1984.³⁵ These Green and White Papers provided for *indirect* elections to the Legco through functional constituencies and geographical constituencies for 24 of the 56 members of the Legco.³⁶ In reference to these proposals a headline in the *Times* stated "Hongkong prepares for democracy",³⁷ but the complicated process of indirect elections did not amount to any sort of democracy in a real sense. The use of the word democracy in this sense was unrealistic because the addition of elected members to the Legco in no way altered the actual function of the government. The reforms in no way affected the Executive Council whose members continued to be appointed by the Governor, and ultimate power in the colony remained in the hands of bureaucrats and civil servants. While it was possible for the Governor to appoint elected members to the Exco, in all likelihood those appointed would be supporters of the status quo which the government was attempting to maintain while being seen to reform. In addition, the representativeness of those elected was questionable.

There were many critics of this system of government. Frank Welsh stated: "The principle of functional constituencies is a classic oligarchic device to ensure that acceptably 'responsible' people get elected".³⁸ Acceptably 'responsible' people in this situation were those who would not rock the boat. One commentator noted of the Green Paper (and this was also true of the subsequent White Paper): "Its proposals ... amount to little more than cosmetic surgery disguising maintenance of the status quo".³⁹ John Walden, the former Hong Kong civil servant, put the case more forcefully and "... called the democratization process 'the grand illusion', ... to appease the people of Hong Kong, maintaining that the reforms amounted to little more

³⁵ *Hong Kong Hansard*, 21 November 1984, Session 1984/85, pp.337-341.

³⁶ "Professionals in Hong Kong were divided into nine functional constituencies, namely, commercial, industrial, financial, labour, social services, education, legal, medical, engineers and associated professions. Members in these functional constituencies elected 12 members to the Legislative Council. Geographically, Hong Kong was also divided into 10 districts, each representing about 500,000 people, from which 10 members were elected. It should be noted that this was still only indirect election because they were elected among the District Board members. In addition, one member each from two special constituencies, the Urban Council and Regional Council, was also elected", C.P. Lo, p.178.

³⁷ *Times*, 22 November 1984, p.5.

³⁸ Welsh, pp.515-516.

³⁹ Huang Chen-ya, 'Green paper, primrose path', *FEER*, 13 September 1984, p.40.

than cosmetic democracy".⁴⁰ The colonial government had no intention of relinquishing their ultimate control over Hong Kong before 1997. While the political complexion of government institutions appeared to be changing, within government there was not widespread support for democracy. Devolution of power from the centre was not a considered option and the people of Hong Kong continued to have little or no influence on the decisions of government.

Elections to the Legco were scheduled to take place on 26 September 1985, exactly one year after the initialling of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Before this date, elections to the District Boards were held in March 1985. These elections were promoted as an important step in the political participation of the Hong Kong people because 10 of those elected would go on to become Legislative Councillors. David Bonavia described these elections as "... a necessary first step on the road to the widening of democratic procedures in Hong Kong ...".⁴¹ Norman Miners states: "... moves towards greater democracy and the promises made by government of further advances in the years ahead encouraged a higher level of participation in the 1985 District Board elections".⁴² It was therefore obvious that the people of Hong Kong were not apathetic but given the opportunity did want, and were willing to play a part, in the government of Hong Kong. This was the only election resembling democracy in the colony. Giving the people of Hong Kong the opportunity to vote for members of the District Boards was the only way in which the colonial government could give a sense of legitimacy to the word 'democratic' in reference to the indirect Legco elections. Popular participation though could not be allowed to interfere with stability.

The authorities continued to be extremely cautious in matters political. Their abhorrence of any strong grass-roots political platform was attested to when, having the option to strengthen either the District Boards or Urban Council, a new Regional Council⁴³ was set up, further undermining the effectiveness of these councils as potential antagonists. Another move that created wide public criticism was the colonial government's attempt to

⁴⁰ James T.H. Tang & Frank Ching, 'The MacLehose-Youde Years: Balancing the "Three-Legged Stool," 1971-86', in *Precarious Balance. Hong Kong Between China and Britain, 1842-1992*, (ed) Ming K. Chan with John D. Young (Hong Kong, 1994), p.161

⁴¹ *Times*, 8 March 1985, p.8.

⁴² Miners, *Government and Politics* (1991), p.37.

⁴³ See 'Regional Council Bill 1985', *Hong Kong Hansard*, 26 June 1985, Session 1984/85, pp.1250-1253.

introduce a Bill by which it would have become a "... criminal offence for anyone to criticize the words of a member of the Legislative Council 'with intentional disrespect'. It also limit[ed] the general public's freedom of access to the proceedings of the council ...".⁴⁴ This was a peculiar Bill for a government that was professing itself to be becoming more democratic. The vague wording of the Bill would have ultimately meant that any criticism of the Legislative Council was a criminal offence, which taken to its logical conclusion would have resulted in Hong Kong having political prisoners. The government of Hong Kong having always pointed to the democratic right to freedom of speech that existed in Hong Kong were seemingly abandoning that very principle on a whim. The Bill was passed after major amendments and despite widespread public opposition.⁴⁵ True to form, the colonial authorities had given just enough to placate the public while still achieving their aim.

The elections to the Legco on 26 September 1985 represented the first attempt to make the government of Hong Kong more truly representative and democratic than it ever had been before. Arguably this representativeness and democracy lagged far behind the commonly perceived definition of democracy as one man, one vote. The fact that some members had been elected however did indirectly give those elected members a mandate from the people of Hong Kong and therefore a moral superiority over those nominated members. To counter this, despite 24 members being elected to the Legco, the remaining 32 members were appointees and officials. The council therefore remained dominated by civil servants, expatriates and elite Chinese businessmen who had always been in control of the colony. These elections then posed little threat to the benevolent autocracy that had dominated Hong Kong's political scene since the British occupation of the territory. In this way the British satisfied the international community with a semblance of democracy and the Hong Kong Government supposedly satisfied the Hong Kong people with a more representative government. Ongoing political reforms were promised to the people of Hong Kong, the first of which was to take place in 1988. The fulfilment of this promise was to be a testament to the British and Hong Kong Government's commitment to democratising Hong Kong.

⁴⁴ *Times*, 11 June 1985, p.7.

⁴⁵ See Emily Lau, 'A privileged retreat', *FEER*, 11 July 1985, pp.22-23.

With the promise of an increasingly representative and democratic government, people in Hong Kong became more politically active. They proved that the lack of direct political activity before this time was not due to apathy but to a lack of participatory channels. The 1984 White Paper had promised a review of the political system in 1987 to look at the possibility of direct elections to the Legco in 1988. It was this promise that mobilised the public. Calls for direct elections had been heard since the publication of the 1984 Green Paper, and some of the newly elected Legco members were publicly in favour of such a move,⁴⁶ despite the Chief Secretary's statement that: "... there was no widespread support ... for direct elections".⁴⁷ These calls did not aim at immediately securing a totally elected Legco, but for at least a partially directly elected element in the council by 1988. Once given a chance to participate in the administration of the colony the political activity of Hong Kong's people only grew.

In 1987 the colonial authorities held the promised review of the government system. This review led to the publication of a White Paper on representative government, which delayed direct elections to the Legco until 1991.⁴⁸ The colonial government gave as its reason that the commissioned McNair public opinion polls showed a majority against direct elections in 1988. This statement was not true; as Norman Miners states:

... when a clear majority of the public showed that it favoured direct elections to the Legislative Council, government distorted the results of the survey and told a deliberate lie in its 1988 White Paper, in order to pretend that its decision to postpone direct elections until 1991 had the support of the public.⁴⁹

The surveys and the White Paper were widely criticised throughout the colony, with people staging public demonstrations and burning the White Paper.⁵⁰ While the mainland Chinese Government had shown concern at the pace of political reform within the colony, the fact still remained that such reform had been promised to the people of Hong Kong and again that promise had been reneged upon. The colonial ideal of stability still

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, 12 December 1985, p.21; 26 December 1985, p.14.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 24 October 1985, p.46.

⁴⁸ See Miners, *Government and Politics* (1991), p.27.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp.209-210 & pp.26-27.

⁵⁰ See *FEER*, 25 February 1988, pp.21-22; 10 March 1988, pp.32-33. Also see Welsh, pp.518-519.

dominated the minds of bureaucrats and the status quo remained essentially intact.

The colonial government's commitment to democracy and representative government was put to the test in the 1991 Legco elections. These elections saw a landslide victory for liberal pro-democracy groups in Hong Kong. "Of the 18 seats up for election (out of the total of 57), all but two were won by liberal critics of government policy ... the main liberal party, the United Democrats of Hong Kong (UDHK) ... returned 12 candidates ...".⁵¹ It was clear that these liberals had a definite mandate from the people of Hong Kong. In a government claiming to be representative it should have been obvious that at least one of the United Democrats be appointed to a seat on the Exco. None were appointed. Frank Welsh states: "The result of this was that the more than 600,000 voters (representing some 85 per cent of those who cast their votes) who had elected 'so-called' liberals had no representation whatsoever on the Executive Council".⁵² Political reform had been adopted grudgingly and the appointments to the Exco in 1991 made a mockery of the new democratic system of government in Hong Kong.

The colonial authorities in Hong Kong had always commended themselves as being a government by consensus, but the events of 1982-1985 showed that this was not a reality. The negotiations over the future of Hong Kong revealed that the views of the people of Hong Kong were never seriously taken into consideration and the Sino-British Joint Declaration was presented to them as a *fait accompli*. With the knowledge that Hong Kong would return to China in 1997 the British and Hong Kong Governments began to consider reforming the colonial administration. This was an issue that had always been neglected and undermined by the reiteration of the myth of apathy about the Hong Kong people. The people of Hong Kong were not, and never had been, apathetic. The main reason that the colonial government was finally considering reform was not public pressure, which was mounting, but so that the British Government would not be censured by world opinion for neglecting and abandoning the people of Hong Kong. Any constitutional reforms made were substantially cosmetic, giving only the semblance of democracy and representativeness, to appease public opinion. The British and Hong Kong Governments were not earnest in

⁵¹ *FEER*, 7 November 1991, p.11.

⁵² Welsh, p.529.

their commitment to democratic reform in Hong Kong. The 1985 indirect elections showed this clearly. The essence of the colonial regime remained and Hong Kong continued to be governed by its traditional benevolent autocracy.

CONCLUSION

THE MYTH EXPOSED

Proponents of the status quo of a benevolent autocracy in Hong Kong have since the late 1940s expounded the myth of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people as a justification for the lack of constitutional political reform in the colony. Few commentators looked to the possibility that it was the nature of the colonial regime that prevented the people of Hong Kong from participating in the government of the colony. The antiquated colonial system of government, which had ruled Hong Kong since the nineteenth century, was a paternalistic system that discouraged political participation from the inhabitants of the colony. Maintenance of the political status quo was the aim of the colonial administration throughout the period of this thesis, 1966 to 1985. The government made every effort in this direction. Political and social reforms were made grudgingly and always in such a way as not to disturb the political stability of the colony. The myth of apathy was one tool by which the colonial government maintained its anomalous position in an era of increasing political demands for self-government.

The belief that the people of Hong Kong were politically apathetic dates back to the early days of colonialism. During the late 1940s the Governor, Sir Mark Young, put forward plans for constitutional reform within the colony. The apparent failure of Hong Kong people to respond to the Unofficials on the Legislative Council and the next Governor, Sir Alexander Grantham's, rejection of these plans ostensibly justified the claim that the people of Hong Kong had no desire to participate in the government of the colony. Supporters of the status quo of autocratic colonial rule created a myth of apathy to preserve their elite position within society. This myth of apathy was reinforced by often conflicting factors such as the belief that the people of Hong Kong followed a traditional Confucian ideology and therefore had no desire to take part in politics; that a fear of communist China had led many to choose the colonial regime for a better way of life; and that there was a low voter registration and turn out to Urban Council elections. These were the tools by which proponents of the status quo justified the continuation of an antiquated colonial regime and lack of constitutional reform. The myth of apathy was widely accepted but it was not the reality.

Following a *laissez faire* policy, the colonial authorities had traditionally been complacent in their attitude towards the welfare of Hong Kong's people. Their attitude was that the people of Hong Kong had no loyalty to the colony, being primarily an immigrant population, and that they felt no stake in their society. This complacency was shattered by the events of 1966 and 1967. A seemingly trivial issue, a rise in first-class ferry fares, sparked the 1966 Kowloon riots. However it was not ferry fares that caused the riots but the government's unwillingness to listen to the wishes of the Hong Kong people. The people of Hong Kong had no way of communicating their feelings to those governing them. That these riots could occur made it clear that the people of Hong Kong were not politically apathetic and that the government's traditional hands-off attitude was no longer sufficient to maintain political stability within the colony. As a consequence the colonial government was forced to rethink its non-interventionist policies. Political stability was their prime objective so rather than allow political concessions the government focused on what it saw as the cause of the riots, a gap of communication between itself and the public, and proceeded to use this gap as an explanation for any dissent within the colony.

The riots of 1966/67 raised many issues that forced the colonial government to recognise the dissatisfaction of the Hong Kong public with their elitist administration. During the final years of Sir David Trench's governorship, 1966 to 1971, reforms began in the social arena to quell the increasing calls for constitutional reform. Sir David had promised to reform the local administration, but replaced this scheme after 1967 with more consultative channels through which the public could ostensibly make their views known to the government. That the government made an effort in this direction was evidence of the administration's awareness of the potential for political activity among the population and that for the political status quo to be maintained the government had at least to be seen to be consulting the public. Other issues pointed to the political awareness of the Hong Kong public, such as a widespread public demand for Chinese (Cantonese) to be made an official language, the call for more locals, as opposed to expatriates, to be promoted within the civil service, and public concern over corruption. The colonial authorities rather than addressing these issues, began to focus upon social reform. Though these reforms were not far-reaching, they did

achieve the aim of the colonial government by diverting attention away from political reform.

A redirection of policy aimed at improving social conditions within the colony characterised the first years of Sir Murray MacLehose's governorship, from 1971 to 1976. This was a period of increasing cordiality between the governments of China and Britain. With China's admittance to the United Nations, Hong Kong's future was becoming increasingly clear. It was the aim of Sir Murray to preserve political stability in Hong Kong and to prepare the colony for its eventual retrocession to China in 1997. For this reason great emphasis was put on social reform, while the issue of political constitutional reform was avoided. Any political reforms made during this period were mere administrative reforms that in no way altered the benevolent autocracy of the colonial regime. Government by consensus was the catch-word of the time. The long ignored issue of corruption proved a major test of the legitimacy of the colonial regime at this time but the government's response gave further evidence that their primary intention was to preserve the status quo. That the corruption issue turned into a huge scandal was evidence of the continuing gap between the government and the people of Hong Kong. The creation of an Independent Commission Against Corruption by Sir Murray, after years of dismissing the problem, showed that the authorities were willing to respond to a situation only when it became volatile enough to threaten the political status quo. Political stability was all-important.

The steps made to address areas of social reform during the final years of Sir Murray's governorship, from 1977 to 1982, were increasingly inadequate in the face of growing demands for more representative and accountable government. That the colonial authorities and in particular Sir Murray would do all within their power to maintain autocratic control was highlighted by the near mutiny of the police force in 1977 and Sir Murray's subsequent concessions to corrupt policemen. The police force was an integral part in maintaining colonial hegemony and the government could not afford to alienate them. Some political concessions were made in this period but they were essentially administrative, and while they gave the appearance of more representativeness and accountability, they did not fundamentally alter the workings of the authoritarian colonial regime. Sir Murray managed to achieve his goal of maintaining the political status quo

of a benevolent autocracy by making meagre political concessions and promising further reform. This stability was all-important for the impending negotiations on Hong Kong's future between China and Britain.

The Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong's future dominated the first two years of Sir Edward Youde's governorship, from 1982 to 1984. The Hong Kong Government's reiteration that they were governing by consensus and consultation was shown to be unrealistic by the events of 1982-1984. There was no consultation with the people of Hong Kong over their future though many public-opinion polls showed that they desired to be informed and consulted. The Sino-British Joint Declaration was presented to the people of Hong Kong and the world as a final statement on the fate of Hong Kong, that the colony would return in its entirety to China in 1997. Giving the people of Hong Kong the chance to comment on the Agreement when it could not be altered was testament to the colonial regime's reluctance to consult the people of Hong Kong on this issue. Statements by the Chinese Government that they desired Hong Kong people to administer Hong Kong put the colonial authorities in a precarious position. They had always been reluctant to give the people more say in the governing of the colony because it could have threatened colonial hegemony. Now calls for elected representation to the Legco were intensifying and as a result, the British and Hong Kong Governments legislated for the first election to the Legco to take place in 1985. These elections though were a mere semblance representative government as they consisted of complicated, indirect elections for only a minority of councillors. There was still little desire to give the people of Hong Kong a say in the government. It was an exercise in public appeasement and a showcase for the world. The events of 1988 and 1991 showed the lack of commitment on the part of the colonial authorities to allow truly representative government though it was clear this was what many of Hong Kong's people desired.

The notion of political apathy expounded by supporters of the autocratic colonial status quo was never the reality in Hong Kong. The people of Hong Kong were in no way indifferent to what was happening in their home as was shown as early as the 1966 Kowloon riots. Government efforts to quell political agitation through social reforms also reinforced this fact. One tool used by the colonial government in this effort to maintain stability was to react to a situation only when it threatened the colonial regime, as with the

corruption issue and the near mutiny of the police. While professing to rule by consensus, in reality the colonial government remained throughout the entire period 1966 to 1985, the benevolent autocracy that it had always been. Political apathy was a construct created by those in control to excuse their antiquated elitist colonial regime. The people of Hong Kong were not apathetic, they were consistently and consciously denied any substantial opportunity to participate in the governing of the colony by the colonial authorities.

This thesis was based on the use of English language sources and therefore had to concentrate on the colonial government's and other English speakers observations of the political apathy of the Hong Kong people. A similar analysis using Chinese language sources would reinforce these findings. There is also a potential for further research in this field when embargoed government documents, such as the reports of the meetings of the Executive Council of Hong Kong, become available. These documents will be an important resource to discovering the motivation behind government policies. Gerard A. Postiglione, General Editor of the *Hong Kong Becoming China: The Transition to 1997* series, stated in 1993:

As its late colonial era draws to a close, Hong Kong finds itself with a highly educated and fully literate population that enjoys the second-highest living standard, after Japan, within an economically booming Asia. Yet genuine democracy remains an illusion as Britain and China deny Hong Kong's six million people a legislature that is even one-half directly elected.¹

Research into the ability of these governments to continue to deny the people of Hong Kong a truly representative government would be a topic of great importance to understanding the agendas of the British and Chinese Governments. Such research would also give insight into the inability of the Hong Kong people to have an effective influence on the government of their home. There is no consensus on these issues and this leaves room for ample original research that will allow scholars of Hong Kong's imperial and post-imperial history many years of indulgence.

¹ Gerard A. Postiglione, 'Series General Editor's Forward', in *Precarious Balance. Hong Kong Between China and Britain, 1842-1992*, p.ix.

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