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RTHK PROGRAMME STAFF UNION'S RESPONSE ON
“REPORT ON REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN HONG KONG”
(29.6.2007)

1) The Union raises vehement doubts over the findings of the Committee on the Review of Public Service Broadcasting which proposed RTHK would not be suitable to be transformed into the future public service broadcaster. We find the conclusions made in the report are unjustified and unfair to RTHK staff who have been contributing selflessly to the station.

2) Paragraph 91 of the report pointed out, “...All existing staff members of RTHK are government employees. The majority of them joined as career civil servants...” “The transformation of RTHK into a statutory body naturally demands a detailed examination which might well result in drastic changes to the manpower structure and staff employment terms”. But the fact is, only 333 of a total of 600-some RTHK staff are civil servants and nearly half of the total, that is about 280, are employed on contract terms. The actual number of civil servants that the government needs to deal with is far smaller than the number which it had tackled during the revamp of the Hospital Authority. This demonstrated that the issue could be resolved.

3) Paragraph 93 of the report read, “According to a survey report released by the RTHK Programme Staff Union in March 2006, the prospect of a change in existing civil servant status drew mixed responses from staff...” The Union has to clarify that the survey was done during a time when no concrete proposal was raised over how RTHK transforms into the future public service broadcaster. Under this context, the survey finds 45% of staff polled agreed RTHK to be hiked off from the government, 11% of staff was uncertain and 32% disagreed.

4) In the same survey, we asked staff whether they agreed RTHK should adopt an operating structure similar to that of the BBC. That is the body will receive some form of funding from the government and will set up a board of directors who will be elected by the public in an open and fair manner; while a Chief Executive Officer, which is equivalent to the current Director of Broadcasting, will take charge of daily operation. The idea is close to what was proposed by the Committee. Survey results showed 61% of the staff agreed to the idea while those who disagreed was merely 14.5%.

5) In addition, 70% of staff favoured legislation to ensure RTHK's role as a public service broadcaster.



6) The Committee fabricated RTHK staff were a group of people who were unwilling to change by selectively quoting the survey findings of the Union. And concluded as Paragraph 96 read, “The Committee does not favour the transformation of RTHK into a public broadcaster. Instead, it proposes the establishment of a new public broadcaster with a fresh start”. The Union expressed strong discontent and deep regret over the conclusion.

7) The report repeatedly selectively used data to distort actual situation. Paragraph 48 of the report wrote, “According to research conducted by the Committee, in 2005, the PSB-like programme output by commercial broadcasters was over 11,000 hours for TV...” while in Paragraph 49, it reads, “ RTHK produced 557 hours of TV productions...” It appeared the Committee wanted to say RTHK’s contribution was negligible and commercial TV station contributed a lot. However, the reality is RTHK doesn’t have its own TV channel and could only broadcast its wide range of programmes during designated hours. The Union is of the view that such comparison doesn’t carry much weight. On contrary, under such constraint, RTHK produces a lot of high quality and memorable programmes such as “Under the Lion Rock”, “Hong Kong Connection”, “The Headliner”, and “City Forum”, etc.

8) Paragraph 95 in the report wrote “Any proposal to modify RTHK into a public broadcaster will also pre-empt government decision on what role it may assign to RTHK, as a government department, following the formation of a public broadcaster. The Committee has consciously steered away from discussing this matter, as it falls outside of the Committee’s terms of reference” But it concluded in Paragraph 96 “...a sea change in RTHK’s status is bound to be fraught with practical and insurmountable problems, and not conducive to the start-up of a new public broadcaster. Therefore, the Committee does not favour the transformation of RTHK into a public broadcaster. Instead, it proposes the establishment of a new public broadcaster with a fresh start” The Union finds the report contradictive, the conclusion hasty and unfair to RTHK staff as well as unconvincing to the public.

9) The Union believes it is too early to draft an implementation plan as stated in Chapter 10 of the report. We find it meaningless and impractical. The chapter should be dealt with during the next round of government public consultation and should be drafted until the future of RTHK is set.

10) As to the report’s elaboration on “A new public service broadcaster”, we have the following opinion:



11) In terms of governance, the Union is highly concerned over the appointment of directors. We believed the entire appointment process should be fair, transparent and allow public involvement. The government should allow the public to have direct communications with incoming directors in a bid to raise their recognition.

12) In terms of financing, we propose an interim review with a period of 5 years to assess market response and to evaluate the 20% cap of other income of the new body is acceptable. The reason of doing this is to make sure the new body will enjoy a stable and sound financial support.

13) On programmes and mission, we believe the future body should play a role in monitoring the implementation of government policy to demonstrate the right of freedom of speech.

14) Conclusion: RTHK is an 80-year-old tree which had witnessed dramatic changes throughout the years. On one hand, it has to perform its role as a media, but on the other hand, it comes across the constraints as a government body. We should be grateful that the tree hasn't fallen and still upright and that we are still public broadcasting. However, this tree is being taken care of by generations of RTHK staff. It will be a loss to Hong Kong people if the tree is to be uprooted. We strongly insisted that RTHK should become the future public service broadcaster.