

OFFICIAL REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Meeting of 24th January 1968

PRESENT

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR (*PRESIDENT*)
SIR DAVID CLIVE CROSBIE TRENCH, KCMG, MC
THE HONOURABLE THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (*Acting*)
MR DAVID RONALD HOLMES, CBE, MC, ED
THE HONOURABLE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
MR DENYS TUDOR EMIL ROBERTS, QBE, QC
THE HONOURABLE THE SECRETARY FOR CHINESE AFFAIRS (*Acting*)
MR PAUL TSUI KA-CHEUNG, OBE
THE HONOURABLE THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY
MR JOHN JAMES COWPERTHWAITTE, CMG, OBE
THE HONOURABLE ALEC MICHAEL JOHN WRIGHT, CMG
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS
THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM DAVID GREGG, CBE
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
THE HONOURABLE ROBERT MARSHALL HETHERINGTON, DFC
COMMISSIONER OF LABOUR
THE HONOURABLE ALASTAIR TODD
DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WELFARE
THE HONOURABLE TERENCE DARE SORBY
DIRECTOR OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
THE HONOURABLE GEOFFREY MARSH TINGLE
DIRECTOR OF URBAN SERVICES
THE HONOURABLE KENNETH STRATHMORE KINGHORN
DISTRICT COMMISSIONER, NEW TERRITORIES
THE HONOURABLE DHUN JEHANGIR RUTTONJEE, CBE
THE HONOURABLE KAN YUET-KEUNG, CBE
THE HONOURABLE FUNG HON-CHU, OBE
THE HONOURABLE TANG PING-YUAN, OBE
THE HONOURABLE TSE YU-CHUEN, OBE
THE HONOURABLE KENNETH ALBERT WATSON, OBE
THE HONOURABLE WOO PAK-CHUEN, OBE
THE HONOURABLE GEORGE RONALD ROSS
THE HONOURABLE SZETO WAI, OBE
THE HONOURABLE WILFRED WONG SIEN-BING, OBE
THE HONOURABLE JAMES DICKSON LEACH, OBE
DR THE HONOURABLE CHUNG SZE-YUEN, OBE
THE HONOURABLE WILSON WONG TZE-SAM

ABSENT

DR THE HONOURABLE TENG PIN-HUI, CMG, OBE
DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

IN ATTENDANCE

THE DEPUTY CLERK OF COUNCILS
MR DONALD BARTON

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10th January 1968 were confirmed.

PAPERS

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY, by Command of His Excellency the Governor, laid upon the table the following papers: —

<i>Subject</i>	<i>LN No</i>
Subsidiary Legislation:—	
Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance.	
Definition of “British Territory”	1
Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance.	
Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment of Second Schedule) Order 1968	2
Sessional Paper 1968:—	
No 4—Annual Report by the Director of Marine for the year 1966-67.	
Report: —	
Report of the Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund for the period 1st September 1965 to 31st August 1967.	

WILLS (FORMAL VALIDITY) BILL 1968

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL moved the Second reading of:—“A Bill to amend the law relating to the formal validity of wills.”

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

The question was put and agreed to.

The Bill was read the Second time.

Council then went into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.

Clauses 1 to 9 were agreed to.

Council then resumed.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL reported that the Bill before Council had passed through Committee without amendment and moved the Third reading.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

The question was put and agreed to.

The Bill was read the Third time and passed.

LEGAL AID (AMENDMENT) BILL 1968

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL moved the Second reading of:—"A Bill to amend further the Legal Aid Ordinance."

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

The question was put and agreed to.

The Bill was read the Second time.

Council then went into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.

Clauses 1 to 3 were agreed to.

Council then resumed.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL reported that the Bill before Council had passed through Committee without amendment and moved the Third reading.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

The question was put and agreed to.

The Bill was read the Third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY moved the adjournment.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL seconded.

MR P. C. Woo addressed the Council.

He said:—Your Excellency, it is most encouraging to hear the recent announcement of the Prime Minister in the House of Commons that there is no question of reducing the strength or effectiveness of the British garrison in Hong Kong though Britain will pull its forces out of South-East Asia by 1971. This statement, no doubt, confirms the intention of the British Government to give continuous support to the people of Hong Kong.

We must not, however, become complacent. We must continue to be vigilant and at the same time to strive to improve the well-being of the people of Hong Kong. To achieve this, it is necessary that there should be better understanding and closer relationship and co-operation between Government and people.

At the time of the disturbance's in 1966, a good deal was heard about the gap between Government and people. The Commission of Enquiry on the 1966 disturbances found that the vast majority of the population did not wish any major change in the constitutional form of Government but would have a freer two-way exchange of information and ideas between Government and people.

Never had it been seen before such close relationship and mutual understanding between Government and people as in last summer, when the very structure of our society was threatened. It cannot be denied that last year law and order were preserved only because the great majority of the population and Government were of one mind and purpose to stamp out lawless violence and subversion.

Now that the situation in Hong Kong is returning to normal and the trouble-makers appear to have stopped, at least for the time being, from trying to ruin our livelihood, it is time to give renewed attention to the further improvement of relationship, co-operation and understanding between Government and people.

The particular aspect that I wish to raise to-day is the necessity for the proper assessment of public opinion so that Government is equipped with this essential knowledge and due weight is given to it in Government policies. It is my belief that Government does try to reflect public opinion in forming policies for action. It is also my belief that there is room for considerable improvement in the mechanism used by Government to assess the direction and strength of public opinion, and to explain the achievements and aims of Government to the ordinary people.

Be this as it may, there is an urgent and pressing need for an improvement in contact between Government and people because of the problems caused by the growth in size of our population and its spread over new areas. When Hong Kong was with a small population, simpler social problems and more limited resources, it might have been satisfactory to rely on simple and somewhat casual way of gathering and gauging public opinion. The circle of official and private acquaintances of those who had to take decisions was then probably wide enough to give them a reasonable assessment of public opinion on most matters.

However, I would challenge anyone who held this view to-day. With a population nearing four million, with the rapid growth of the new towns, which we modestly call "estates", and with a kaleidoscopic diversity of economy and interest it is impossible for any single person to acquire from acquaintances a reliable assessment of public opinion. I would not go to the opposite extreme and argue that opinion could only be assessed by sample polls of the sort that are so popular in Britain and America, but I do believe that some more sophisticated and

permanent machinery is required to keep Government servants in touch with public opinion and to transmit Government's thinking to the ordinary people.

Sir, I understand that this matter has been under serious consideration by Government for some time and I shall be glad if Government can enlighten us as to what steps are being proposed to improve the relationship, co-operation and understanding between Government and people.

THE SECRETARY FOR CHINESE AFFAIRS addressed the Council.

He said:—Sir, my honourable Friend suggests that more should be done by the Government to reach ordinary people in order to learn of public opinion and to explain the aims of Government policy. Of course no government can ever be satisfied that more should not be done in this direction. To appreciate the opportunity and scope for further advance it is worth considering what is available already in the machinery of government.

Every government department has a responsibility in the course of its own functions for maintaining a mutually satisfactory understanding between the government and the general public. Special responsibility for this work falls on the Information Services Department and the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs.

For over a century my own department has been developed with the primary objective of maintaining an effective, though by no means the sole channel of communication between Government and the Chinese people who today form 99% of the population in Hong Kong. In this direction it has recently been specifically laid down in Government Regulations that, subject to obvious limitations, officers of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs are not only to maintain, but also to improve, personal relationships and direct contacts with leading Chinese residents and with lawful Chinese societies, and traditional organizations in Hong Kong, so that they may effectively assess trends of Chinese public opinion, and assist in the presentation of official policies to the Chinese public.

Working towards this end we in the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs have not only co-operated closely with the UMELCO and with the Ward Offices of the Urban Council, but also maintaining close contact with a very large number of well-known Chinese traditional organizations, notably the Kai Fong, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, the Po Leung Kuk, the Lok Sin Tong, and many others, and with hundreds of societies such as the district associations, the trade associations, the clansmen's associations and many others. In recent years, we have involved ourselves in depth in the formation and development of many

associations of multi-storey building owners and residents, for the specific purpose of dealing with problems of management in such buildings, some of which house as many people as you may find in a small town. Through these contacts, we in the SCA have good reason to believe that as a team, we have acquired for ourselves an intimate knowledge of, and unique experience in, a great variety of problems peculiar to the highly urbanized way of life in this prosperous twin-city of ours.

I should hasten to add that the SCA's contacts with the people have not been confined to liaison with associations and leaders of opinion by the methods I have just described. As honourable Members are aware, for over a century the SCA has offered, and is today still offering, a service for mediation or reconciliation of many and varied disputes, particularly family and tenancy disputes. In the course of rendering these services, we have been trusted with details not only of the ways in which many people live, but of the many things they have to say about themselves and about the Government. The establishment in 1961, under the auspices of the SCA, of the Public Enquiry Service has enabled the latter not only to answer but also to document well over a million questions put by the ordinary men and women in the street relating to Government intentions and to policies and departmental procedures.

I mention these varying means and methods in order to show how the SCA officers have maintained their contacts and communications with the ordinary people of Hong Kong. Of course the volume of work carried out is limited because the availability of staff is limited, but I nevertheless believe that we have a very wide and representative cross-section of contacts. The fact that all correspondence and interviews are carried out in either English or Chinese has helped, I think, to maintain and develop and broaden these contacts.

Our experience in endeavouring to maintain our contacts at personal levels, has caused us to realize the limitations of such means and to appreciate the importance of communication through the highly developed modern mass media, such as the newspapers, the radio, the television etc. For this reason, we have always worked closely with our colleagues in the Government Information Services Department and also in Radio Hong Kong.

At the commencement of the disturbances in May last year a special unit was set up in the Information Services Department to which were also seconded an Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs, a Police Inspector and staff from Radio Hong Kong. Their work was directed by a committee under the chairmanship of a senior officer of the Colonial Secretariat. The Government recognizes, in the existence and function of the Information Services Department, an obligation to keep the public informed, through the press and other means, of its actions and

policies. This regular flow of factual material may be relied upon in the long run to inform and influence responsible public opinion even in the face of a determined campaign of anti-government propaganda, employing lies and distortion, as the events of 1967 made clear. What governs the nature and amount of material is mainly what the government is doing at any particular time. Normal information programmes take as their starting point what the government happens to be doing at any particular time. The special unit has been filling the need for study, with the help of my own department and other departments and organizations, of public attitudes on other issues, and for the production of information programmes to influence public opinion on these issues. I believe that valuable results have been achieved. The question how far these special arrangements should be perpetuated is under study at the present time.

As violent subversion declines new measures are being considered for extending public information facilities. The Director of Information Services has drawn up proposals for the larger departments to have their own information sections. These proposals are now being examined and if found to be reasonable, and something we can afford, they will in due course be presented to honourable Members in Finance Committee. The aim of these proposals is to provide more direct communication between departments and the public, to stimulate departmental interest in public relations and to increase public understanding of the functions and performance of the Government at working level.

Sir, I have given a brief and factual account of outlining merely something of what is being done at present in the field of work to which Mr Woo referred. I think we have much to be proud of in what has been done, but I am in no sense complacent. We have been faced, and are still faced, with new and unscrupulous techniques which are used for the purpose of discrediting the Government without any regard at all to facts or reason. I and my colleagues are conscious at all times of the need to vary the nature of Government's response in accordance with the nature of the hostile propaganda with which we may from time to time be faced.

MR K. S. KINGHORN addressed the Council.

He said:—Your Excellency, my honourable Friend the Secretary for Chinese Affairs has given an account of liaison work concerned mainly with the urban areas. My concern is with the New Territories where we have somewhat different arrangements.

There the system of Government, which was developed when the New Territories was entirely rural, has stood the test of time and is still appropriate today. Originally District Officers and the Police provided practically the only Government presence in the New Territories. The District Officers we're directly responsible for a great

many executive functions and were magistrates in addition. The numerous functions of the District Officer meant that he was brought into close contact with many aspects of political and social life in the villages and towns.

As time passed and public services came to require more specialist knowledge, the District Officers shed their judicial functions and many of their executive functions, but they developed increasing contact with all levels of public opinion in the New Territories.

This contact is maintained both informally and formally. District Officers and their Assistants spend a good deal of their time visiting centres of population and attending functions where they meet both leaders and ordinary men and women. Throughout the New Territories there is a three-tier system of representation in advisory councils. The Village Representative speaks for his village and the surrounding area. Then in each District there is a number of Rural Committees comprising the Village Representatives of the various areas.

District Officers and their liaison staff hold meetings and conduct correspondence with Rural Committees and Village Representatives on all aspects of Government activity in the District as well as on many social and political matters. Like my Friend the SCA we confer and correspond in the Chinese language when this is more convenient to those with whom we are dealing.

The top layer of consultative bodies in the New Territories is formed by the Heung Yee Kuk, which is an advisory body established by law. I hold regular monthly meetings with the Chairman, Vice Chairmen and other representatives of the Executive Committee of the Heung Yee Kuk at which matters of concern to the New Territories as a whole are discussed. From time to time officers of departments working in the New Territories discuss their work with the Kuk—sometimes at the monthly meetings to which I have referred.

The District Officer system developed, as I have said, when the New Territories was entirely rural in character, but it has adapted itself well to the spread of urban development. Today one of the District Officers is concerned with the town of Tsuen Wan which has all the problems of a part of the urban areas. In Tsuen Wan will be found industrial development, commercial and tenement blocks, resettlement estates and a new town development at Kwai Chung.

The change from rural to urban character has not made the work of the District Officer superfluous. Quite the reverse. The social and local political problems of a town growing as fast as Tsuen Wan are even more complex than those of a large rural district. The Rural Committee system as it was originally developed is of course not adequate for circumstances such as those we find in Tsuen Wan today.

There is, however, a great variety of other social organizations in Tsuen Wan and the District Officer is at present working with many of them to form a Federation which should be able to reach a wide section of local opinion.

If I may sum up, Sir, these few observations by referring to recent events, I would say that throughout the difficulties last year the District Officer system has proved its value as a means of keeping closely in touch with the needs and aspirations of the people—and all shades of opinion in any locality—and representing these to the Government. It has also in my view proved that, even in the unusual circumstances with which we have had to deal, it remains an effective agency of communication between the people and the Government in the New Territories.

Sir, I beg to support the motion.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY addressed the Council.

He said:—Sir, I must say bluntly, and at the outset, and at the risk of inviting criticism, that I have never been much of a believer in “the gap”. But what I have always believed in, during almost thirty years spent in the service of this community, is that there is always room for improvement in the quality of the service which the public service supplies to the people.

Of course there are always gaps in any fabric. We are dealing here with the fabric of a service of some 70,000 public servants working for a population of nearly four million people, substantially more than the population of Norway or New Zealand. Gaps of various kinds show up all the time, as new tensions and stresses and aspirations and needs develop, and it would be a miracle if it were not so. Probably the chief ambition of a mediocre civil servant is to reach a point of equilibrium where the machinery of the government runs on efficiently by its own inertia or momentum. But he will be unwise to seek to reach any such equilibrium here, for in Hong Kong, if experience is any guide, the course of events will always be likely to change more swiftly than the Government’s policies, however imaginative and energetic the officers who formulate them may be.

In assessing the extent to which public policy is in line with, or can be kept in line with, public opinion, it would be wrong to omit reference to the recent, or perhaps I should say to the current, struggle with the Communist elements in our society. I have no doubt but that if there were gaps in our ranks this confrontation has tended to close them. History teaches us that a free society tends to reveal a hidden strength when ‘the nature of the fabric which holds it together is put to the test, especially if the nature of the test is by means of violent assault; and Hong Kong has certainly shown over the last nine months that it is no exception to this rule. Those of us who, like yourself, Sir, know the place and know the people, would have expected no other result.

But do we then conclude that all is well and that the points raised by my honourable Friend Mr Woo call for no response, no reaction, no change in our arrangements? No, Sir, we do not.

We have been studying for several years the question whether we cannot improve upon the accepted and orthodox methods of administering this large and sophisticated conurbation, having especial regard to the various considerations which Mr Woo has raised today, and I shall later this afternoon be proposing to the Finance Committee of this honourable Council that a start should be made towards the setting up of a City District Officer system which I hope might prove to be a substantial reinforcement of the present administrative machine. Our aim, if these proposals should prove to be acceptable, is to set up ten District Offices in the urban districts of Hong Kong and Kowloon as soon as the necessary staff can be assembled.

The proposal is that these officers should be responsible to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, and in one sense there is nothing more here than a suggestion that that Secretariat should be substantially expanded. But in fact there is a good deal more to it than that. These men are intended to be political officers, in the sense that the District Officers in the New Territories, whom they will in many ways resemble, are political officers. They will be as accessible as possible to those living in their Districts, and they will keep in touch with all local organizations. They will be required to assess the overall impact of government policies on the people of their districts and to explain these policies, as well as the difficulties and the achievements of the government to ordinary people. Although they will not at first be required to carry out many executive functions they will be responsible for advising on the co-ordination of public services. They will consider whether there should be any variation in emphasis in government policies in the Districts and they may initiate proposals for changes in policies or for new policies when the need for these becomes apparent from the feeling of the public. They will be expected to get to know of the problems and conflicts and trends of public thinking in their districts before attitudes have been struck. We hope that their work will strengthen the ability of the Government to give all the people who live here a fair share of those services which the community can afford.

The formulation of these proposals has led us to consider the question whether the name of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs should not be changed at this time. We have reached the conclusion that whilst we think that there probably should be a change in the name, we are not sure what the new name should be. The most favoured suggestion so far put forward is that the English name should be changed to Secretary for Community Affairs and that the Chinese name should be Noi Ching Ch'u. There is no hurry to give effect to any change which may be decided upon, and we would welcome the views of the honourable Members of this Council and also of the public in due course.

These proposals are based upon ideas which have been under discussion for some considerable time. The intention behind them is to improve the quality of our administration, and if this Council should agree to appropriate the necessary funds, it will be my personal endeavour to ensure as far as I can that the people of Hong Kong receive the best possible service under these new arrangements.

Finally Sir, it is not easy to describe these proposals in full detail within the compass of a short adjournment speech. We shall be explaining in more detail—if the scheme finds favour with honourable Members—we shall be explaining in more detail in the usual ways later, in order that the public may fully understand what this scheme proposes.

The question was put and agreed to.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR:—Before I adjourn Council I think honourable Members would wish me to express our appreciation to Mr TSUI before he leaves us, for his services to this Council and, indeed, to the whole Colony over the past six months.

NEXT MEETING

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR:—Council will now adjourn and the next meeting will be held on 14th February.