

## Government officials probe effects of corporal punishment in Hongkong

# BAN THE CANE — WHITEHALL

by  
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**HONGKONG is being asked by Whitehall to consider banning corporal punishment — a move that could anger certain sections of the community already fighting to bring back the hangman's noose.**

Government officials are now understood to be carrying out a full-scale probe into the effects of caning on offenders because of the latest development.

The security branch of the Government Secretariat has been asked to do the study and the results will go to the Executive Council.

The Governor and his top aides will have to make the final decision.

A Government source said yesterday the ban would only cover judiciary-ordered flogging while light caning in schools and reform homes will be maintained.

"The Government has always conducted studies into the effects of caning but a more intense study is now being done because of world-wide trends," another source said.

He said Britain was closely watching Hongkong's progress on the issue and Whitehall would very much like to see the territory's decision-makers rule against the cane.

But official feeling in Hongkong on the issue is understood to be varied.

Some feel corporal punishment is a "barbaric and medieval" form of punishment while other officials are worried that a ban on flogging could create bitter feelings among certain sections of the community which have already had to accept a ban on capital punishment.

Capital punishment is still in the Hongkong law books but those receiving the death sentence always get a reprieve from the Governor. The last execution was in 1966.

Judges in Hongkong can order caning as the only punishment or an additional penalty in a series of offences listed in a schedule to the corporal punishment law.

These include robbery, possession of weapons, rape and other offences against women, theft and wounding.

Judiciary-ordered caning is described as heavy caning and it is this that Whitehall apparently wants banned.

Hongkong officials are understood to be not willing to consider getting rid of the light cane used in schools.

The Executive Council in 1977 also approved new

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power's giving the authorities the right to cane inmates of reform schools.

Such inmates can get a maximum of 12 lashes for six different types of disciplinary offences ranging from assault and indecency to swearing and trying to escape.

Attorney General John Hobley told Legislative Councilors in 1977 that caning was a "useful punishment" for some offenders.

But he added at the time it was not possible to say if caning of offenders had a deterrent effect on others.

Judiciary-ordered caning in Hongkong is on the decrease, however, and officials yesterday pointed out that this was because there has been a steadying of violent crime compared with the early 1970s.

The 1977 Prisons Department report showed 36 offenders had been given 187 strokes compared with 72 offenders receiving 518 lashes a year earlier.

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