

S. C. 201.7

17 October 1981

# 1997: moves to poll the people's views

Moves are underway to discover what Hongkong's public think of the fast-expiring lease and to suggest solutions to the problem of 1997.

There are plans for two public surveys, at least one of which would be by an internationally established pollster.

Local groups also hope to launch a research institute to look into the vital issue and suggest possible solutions.

The moves were disclosed following a call by a Hongkong University lecturer, Dr John Young, for the Government to set up an independent "think tank" to look into the question.

Yesterday, the Hongkong Observers said they hope to mount a poll with the aid of

"an internationally reputed survey firm" to look into public attitudes on the issue.

The Observers' chairman, Dr Joseph Cheng, also said that he was one of a number of people interested in forming a research institute to look into Hongkong's prospects.

Other people involved in the research project, including academics and senior Chinese journalists, are also interested in holding a public poll.

"I think the Government should also consider this problem seriously, but it is not something to be done by the Government alone," said Dr Cheng.

"What is lacking is a definite channel for ideas to be communicated to the Government. There is no way for the

people to express ideas for Hongkong's future."

He welcomed the suggestion of a think tank.

"We need some channel for the whole community to express its ideas and for the message to be passed on to the Peking and British governments. A think tank would be a good idea."

However, the Government said it would not set up a think tank, though it was interested in any views channelled to it on the 1997 issue.

"The Government is not considering the establishment of a think tank on 1997 in the light of the excellent state of relations between Hongkong and China and the comment on Hongkong by the Chinese Vice-Chairman, Mr Deng Xiaoping," a Government spokesman said.

But he added: "The Government does of course note carefully all comments and ideas on the subject put forward by members of the public."

A check by the SCM Post on the views of some other groups suggested there were few firm policies on the lease.

A spokesman for Umelco said of the 1997 issue: "So far it has not been discussed, as far as I know."

And in the business world, the American Chamber of Commerce had much the same to say, though with a distinct note of confidence.

"There is no official policy about the matter," a spokesman said.

But he continued: "It has been talked about. We have no doubt a solution will be found before that date."

"Amcham has certainly got confidence in the future of Hongkong."

An Urban Councillor, Mr Ambrose Choi, believes China will not take over Hongkong as it is very important in its "Four Modernisations" programme.

He told a dinner meeting of the Rotary Club of Kun Tong that China would take "at least 30 years" to complete the programme and catch up with other advanced countries.

Therefore, he said, China will not take over Hongkong before the programme is completed.