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A Gallant effort to give consumers a better deal

THE new chairman of the Consumer Council describes himself as a workaholic.

And it would seem to be a very accurate description for a man who usually works 16 hours a day seven days a week. Even in a City renowned for its driving pressure must take some beating. At 35, Gallant Ho has already served on a host of private bodies and government bodies ranging from the St Paul's College Council to chairmanship of the Po Leung Kuk community.

Now he has taken over leadership of the organisation which protects over 5 million people in Hong Kong from the unscrupulous activities of dishonest manufacturers and businessmen.

Certainly Mr Ho appears to have a single minded dedication towards any project with which he gets involved; "I have no hobbies outside work. If there are things to do I like to get on with them.

By David Matcolm

I don't like to delegate responsibility, nor do I wish to stay idle. That is probably why I work 14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week. If even more work is given to me I'd be able to do it."

He admits this gives him little time to be at his Peak home with his wife and eight year old daughter; "I'm afraid my commitment usually means that I only get time to be with my family for lunch or dinner."

Mr Ho was educated at St Paul's and La Salle colleges before going to Hong Kong University. He obtained a first class honours Bachelor of Arts degree in accounting, economics and business management and left at the age of 20 to study law. During the last ten years he has built up his own law practice in Hong Kong and become involved with a large number of organisations.

He has served on the

before the product is put on the market."

"I think the Consumer Council has the real interests of the consumers in mind and brings abuses to the Government's attention. People must remember however that it would require a lot of legislation to police and enforce laws setting standards for every type of products."

"If we legislate too much we have got to be sure we have the people to adequately enforce that legislation. It is useless to make laws if unscrupulous merchants can break them because they cannot be enforced."

He says the Council members are not in a position to act themselves. They can only report to the Government and let them take the necessary steps.

Should more pressure be put on the Government following criticism that they are dragging their feet over consumer protection?

Mr Ho replied; "The Consumer Council has never been a 'yes' man to the Government. I'm not a yes man. I chaired the Committee pressing for hire purchase laws to be revised and a report has been submitted recommending changes."

Under the proposed law, agreements will have to state the terms of the sale clearly: "This will stop vital details of agreements being hidden away in smudged small print at the bottom of the page," said Mr Ho.

He believes that the Trade Description Ordinance and the Weights and Measures Act which should become law later this year will be a big step forward for consumers. Under this legislation the regulations relating to false claims in advertising will be tightened up and labelling on products will have to accurately describe the contents.

Questioned about the apparent bias in the law against the interests of the consumer Mr Ho said that in some areas there were obviously vaults.

"Such issues as hire purchase and the sale of flats need attention and these have been the subject of in-depth studies. There has to be a very

delicate balance between commerce and consumers. It is not our object to be destructive to commerce and business."

He thought that the laissez faire economy acts in favour of the public rather than against it: "I'm not an economist but I should think that where there is more competition the consumer benefits."

Commenting on the overall standard of goods manufactured in Hong Kong he said: "It depends on the types of product you are talking about. Not many are for local sales. Most are for export. For Hongkong manufactured goods I should not think most of them are sub-standard."

"There may be goods which fall short of standards set by Western countries but even the British, American and Japanese standards differ."

"I'm not saying we should sit back and do nothing or that we're in a happy and comfortable situation."

He pointed out that the Council conduct their own product testing to locate unsafe goods and, the establishment of the new monitoring committee to check on deceptive sales practices will improve the situation.