

A new ball-game for a zealous Scot

HE criss-crossed the soccer field as a boy of 14 playing representative football in the Scottish Schoolboy Championship. In early 1940 he tried to buy his discharge from the Royal Air Force with the idea of turning a professional footballer. It's just as well he didn't succeed.

That decision marked a milestone in the life of James David McGregor, who, since joining the Government in 1954, has criss-crossed across another field, Hongkong's commerce and industry where he has emerged a consummate expert on the local industrial establishment.

Jimmy McGregor, as he is affectionately known to colleagues and industrialists, traces his debut as an organiser when he went to work on the first ever Certificate of Origin system for Hongkong products. Besides his contribution to the industrialisation of the territory in which 4.3 million people live, Mr McGregor has played no small part in Hongkong's textile negotiations overseas. After serving the Commerce and Industry Department for 21 years, Mr McGregor left the Hongkong General Chamber of Commerce as its new director. A determined Scot who had worked hard to develop Hongkong as a producing centre, Mr McGregor chose to leave the DC and I when he had almost, though not quite, reached the top (he was the department's Deputy Director and, at the time of leaving, its Acting Director). Why did he choose to part company with the department at this juncture? The answer, as he points out, is fairly straightforward.

"I am not far off 52 and I can't see any prospect of becoming the substantive director within the next few months. I need three years to qualify for pension at that level and I would normally be required to retire at 55. So who can suggest a better timing for my exit?"

As he sees it, the Chamber of Commerce is broadly based. It has an accepted role in the institutional system, has an enormous potential for service to trade, industry and the community. Much more than other organisations, he thinks the Chamber has the capacity to co-ordinate at an institutional level.

"A strong and active Chamber can do a lot for commerce and industry in Hongkong. My experience is relevant to its responsibilities and there is the possibility that I can work beyond 55 — assuming, of course, that my peculiar attributes find favour there," he observes.

Mr McGregor's peculiar attributes have over the years earned him the reputation (or accusation) in the Government for tackling some issues with "missionary zeal, blind faith" and, on one occasion, "with a total lack of reason."

His colleagues, however, describe him as being 99 per cent intuitively right and say that he has done more for Hongkong than any others. He works long productive hours. Sometimes he can get so involved with what he is doing that he is apt to forget an appointment he has made.

The Scot's intuition, however, derives from experience and training. He was the dux (a leader or head boy) in his final year at school. He joined the Boys Service of the RAF in early 1940 straight after leaving school and had 2½ years of the best technical training in



Recognise the player second from left in the front row? That's Jimmy McGregor who scored Hongkong's first goal in the match against Indonesia in 1952.

the world at Number One School of Technical Training at Halton, Buckinghamshire. He chose armaments, studying gunnery, bombs and metallurgy.

The young man qualified through examinations for the regular Air Force in 1942. After nearly a year of test-flying, duties in Scotland and Wales, he was posted to India in early 1943. He saw so much in India, he says, that he has never forgotten — the grinding poverty of the people, the arrogance of wealth and power, the separateness of the military and results of bad administration.

says a pensive Mr McGregor: "I learned the values of discipline, observation and compassion. The great famine of 1943 was a traumatic experience."

In 1946, he was sent back to Britain. He went to an aircraft testing and development station. He undertook further technical and management training for more than a year. He came to Hongkong in 1951 as an inspector whose job was to check that technical standards on RAF contract work were being met. Interesting but not exciting, he says, and that's why he sought to join the Government.

"I liked Hongkong partly because I'd had a successful and highly enjoyable record in local football. So I applied to join the Civil Service as an executive officer. I did so in early 1954 and immediately joined the Commerce and Industry Department."

Mr McGregor was then given the task of organising the Certification of Origin system. To begin with, he and his colleagues had virtually no inspection of goods being certified nor any legally authorised inspectors to do the job. They had no hard and fast origin rules and were in trouble with a number of importing countries which

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● First of a two-part feature on Jimmy McGregor who left the Department of Commerce and Industry after 21 years of service yesterday to take over as the new Director of the Hongkong General Chamber of Commerce.

alleged that some of Hongkong's products were simply re-exports of Japanese goods.

Recalling the chaos, he said: "We didn't have adequate legislation and we didn't even certify exports under Commonwealth Preference to our main market, the United Kingdom."

"Bryan Barlow and later, Kenneth Kinghorn were my senior officers (there wasn't any rank between Executive Officer and Assistant Director then). They gave me and my colleague, Alan Trickett, a great deal of scope, to get on with the job. Between us we gradually brought a chaotic situation under organised control. We were soon registering factories, without legal authority, and this registration system has been the essential element in the development of the entire Hongkong certification scheme. There were other departmental officers sharing the responsibilities. I have been almost continually associated with the subject for over 20 years and I am quite proud to have helped to initiate it and bring it to the degree of importance, and efficiency it now enjoys."

From the certification assignment Mr McGregor

moved on to the important area of textiles. From 1960 to 1965, he was directly involved in the early and interminable textile negotiations which resulted in restrictions on a wide range of local textile products. Britain started the ball rolling in 1958 and the United States followed suit in 1960.

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Mr McGregor was a senior trade officer and later an Assistant Director during those years. His working day was at least an average 12 hours for months on end, and with no let-up even during weekends. During that time he organised the textiles division. Looking back, he says now that it wasn't much of a life - his wife didn't see much of him.

"Ronnie Holmes took over as Director from Ginger Angus during my hazardous years on textiles negotiations and controls. I found him (Mr Holmes) not only friendly and helpful as a co-worker but a marvellously patient boss who never flustered under pressure. He was one of the very best and most efficient senior officers I have worked with. Now that I have left the Government I can say these things without being labelled a sycophant.

"Roy Porter and I seem to have worked in close liaison also for many years. We devised the export authorisation system for textile controls over a weekend many years ago. We were also largely responsible for the high cost content scheme for exports of quality textiles to Britain. This had features attractive to many textile industrialists. For example, non-quota holders could export under this scheme. Roy was a real expert in textile controls and systems in those early years."

Nowadays the negotiations are more complicated and broadly based. But even so, he points out, strategy and tactics do not change and Hongkong has been fortunate that the DC and I have developed a good many dedicated and skilled textile negotiators.

"Philip Haddon-Cave was certainly the most intense and professional. He worked like a demon here and overseas. I don't think he's changed much through the years. Bill Dorward and Lawrie Mills

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to propose an industrial reclamation at Kun Tong. DC and I was the co-ordinator for the initial stages of the Kun Tong township and we learned much about how not to go about industrial planning. Some of the co-ordination was pretty atrocious and the industrialists who got the first sites really were pioneers. They should all have been given medals," he says.

"Wong Tok-sau, a later President, used to have a go at the Government every now and again and we sort of expected a new criticism, usually in the press every few months. He brought quite a flair to the CMA and I for one enjoyed his style."

It is flair and style devoid of flattery, which strike a chord with Mr McGregor. He talks of corruption by power and he tongue-lashes those he deems sycophants.

In retrospect, not long after he joined the DC and I in 1954, he had to reorganise the import/export licensing branches and the strategic goods controls. He grew a parallel at the maladministration and the associated corruption that was already going on. The department had had to rely on people who were clearly unreliable and senior officers were struggling with an impossible situation.

"At the lower levels there was a lack of experience, too much to do and very low salaries. Low-level staff had great authority and some were abusing it. Mike Clinton was an Assistant Director at that time and he was leading the fight against corrupt practices. He was responsible for many dismissals and in many organisational improvements. I helped him then and later and developed a great hatred of corruption in the Civil Service which I have never lost.

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money to a DC and I officer, the latter would stop him before the act was completed and subsequently report the manufacturer to a senior DC and I officer. The manufacturer would not be charged. Instead he would be given a lecture not to commit the same again and told to tell his colleagues in industry.

"The police took the view that tea money offers were in themselves illegal whether or not the act of giving had been completed and that all such offers should be reported to the police for investigation," says Mr McGregor.

In the three years the scheme was in operation, he says, the DC and I dealt with about 300 tea-money offers. Since the scheme was ended, only three reports had been referred to the police for investigation and in each case a conviction and prison sentence followed. Since 1970, no reports at all of this kind had been made to Mr McGregor's knowledge.

"I think DC and I are one of the better departments in regard to honesty and it was this way long before the ICAC was established. We didn't consider corruption as something not to be talked about and from senior level down, we openly encouraged discussion within the department and with unofficials and businessmen on ways of eradicating any corruption that existed," he says.

Apart from corruption, Mr McGregor has also had strong views on specialisation. He does not think much of the administrative officers' class, although he has admired the sterling qualities of many of the individuals. Hongkong is far too complex a place, he stresses, to permit a system of "instant experts" in the administrative class who "hop about between departments as if they were on a merry-go-round."

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"In this day and age," he says, "Government departments must inevitably be increasingly specialist in character and they need specialists to run them. Experience and maturity are essential ingredients in the efficiency equation. Initiative and persistence are others."

If Mr McGregor's life in the Government service was pretty dull on the whole, he certainly would not like to give the impression that he had not enjoyed his time with it. He points out that he got being part of a dynamic organisation and he has worked with many fine people. And even if his professional life lacked excitement and lustre, the Scot managed to find them, instead, in sports.

"Couldn't really ask for better or more," he says. At 14, he played representative football in the Scottish Schoolboy Championships. When he was at RAF Halton he had the honour of playing for an RAF side at Wembley Stadium in early 1942 against an Air Training Corps Team for Mrs Churchill's Aid to Russia Fund. "There were 50,000 spectators and I scored for the RAF side. That was a real thrill," Mr McGregor says, his face glowing with pride.

That was a thrill all right. But what wasn't so thrilling was his experience in the jungles of India. He got badly cut at times around the eyes and mouth. That made him stick to his first love, football. "I played for Salisbury in the Southern League and helped trials for Preston North End and Blackpool. I actually signed forms for Blackpool as an amateur, but was posted back to the south of England before I could play for their combination side. When I came here in 1951, I played for the RAF side in the first division."

Few can stop him as he reminisces. "That was a time of good football in Hongkong. The Army had a tremendous side, full of talent, and South China was as good or better. Sing Tao was also a fine side. I had as much football as I wanted and was selected to play for the Combined Services, the Hongkong Selection and finally for the Hongkong national side."

Mr McGregor's soccer career ended in 1957, when he suffered a serious knee injury. Then he turned to cricket with the Centaurs and had the excitement of taking five wickets in five deliveries against the Indian Recreation Club.

At home, sports enthusiast Jimmy McGregor is a soft-spoken father of two: "My wife, a Chinese, and I have friends in both ethnic groups. Our boy goes to an English-language school while our daughter studies at a Chinese-language school. I think we have faced and overcome most of the problems you experience in a mixed marriage - the problems of language, culture, practice and philosophical thinking can be quite substantial."

Mr McGregor and his wife, Christine, have contributed to the underprivileged in ways open to them. For the Sandy Bay Children's Hospital, for example, they have helped to raise more than \$4 million. On social issues, Mr McGregor says: "I have, I suppose, a strong leaning towards socialism but not the sort that ruins national economies. In Hongkong the feeling can only express itself in a deep social consciousness." That consciousness plus his loyalty to Hongkong have never been in question. And for years more to come, the voice and activities of Jimmy McGregor, a man of common sense and conviction, are sure to be in evidence in the Colony. To be concluded