

A bigger say in the government of Hongkong

Sir: Abraham Lincoln once said, "No man is good enough to govern another man without his consent." At last we have heard from the mouth of a representative spokesman that the British government now recognises that this truth applies not only to the people of Great Britain, but to the people of Hongkong.

Lord Goronwy-Roberts has stated to us all in carefully-chosen words that it is now British government policy that the people of Hongkong can have an elected Legislative Council if they want it.

Since the official reaction of local government officials to the pronouncement was that progress can be made in "finding ways and means for greater participation in policy thought and policy making", we should act immediately to put the machinery in motion that will bring about this greater participation.

I would suggest the following as the minimum that would insure the people of Hongkong a voice in the daily decisions that affect their life and their future:

- An enlarged franchise that would include all over 18 who have lived here over three years;
- An Urban Council with a large elected majority that would have greatly-expanded responsibilities, authority and financing in such areas as housing, education, medical services, transport, social welfare and the fire services;
- A Legislative Council whose un-official members would

be elected officials;

A number of objections have been raised by various members of the Government and the press to any tampering with the present system of government by monopoly. It appears to me that they are invalid and are meant to cloud rather than clarify the issues.

We are told:

THAT "Hongkong must maintain its present system of government because of its sensitive geo-political position." Apparently the servants of the British government in Hongkong do not think the British government in London knows what is doing. It is obvious that London weighed the sensitivity of Hongkong's position very carefully before turning Lord Goronwy-Roberts loose to make the kind of deliberate offer that he did to the people of Hongkong.

THAT "the people of Hongkong are not all that interested in representative government." On what basis is this pronouncement made? Who has ever asked them? It is my conviction that if the proposals mentioned above were clearly and simply set before the people and a referendum then held to ascertain their will, they would convincingly adopt them. What self-respecting person would turn down an opportunity to have a say in the decisions that affect his existence?

THAT "giving the people of Hongkong greater participation in government would raise constitutional issues." Constitutions are meant to be instruments that serve societies, not straight-jackets that bind

them! That is why they all include provisions for amendment, so that they will not turn into relics of the past, but reflect the realities of the present. If our constitution has fallen into the category of a sacred cow that hampers our society from becoming what it ought to be, let us by all means amend it or rewrite it, and the sooner, the better.

THAT "Hongkong has enough problems a present without raising the additional one of representation." This is exactly why the issue needs to be raised. A fundamental principle of government is that it will govern as effectively as it is answerable to the people. If there is no orderly means available whereby the people can throw the undesirable ones out, there is no way of insuring that government will seriously tackle problems of corruption and the like. To entrust oneself to government by benevolence is naive.

● To allow oneself to be governed by those who think that some are entitled to run the affairs of men because they are more equal than others is servitude. A government in Hongkong that would be directly responsible to the people whom it governs would be more effective in combating the problem facing this great city than the government as it is presently constituted.

THAT "an elected government in Hongkong will produce political instability." It is rather bewildering to find citizens of Great Britain living in the British colony of Hongkong maligning the very system that is fundamental to

their own civilisation. The question is not one of stability or instability, but rather, what is the best way for a society to go about conducting its affairs? The answer of the British people has been representative government. It seems to me that what is good enough for

the people of Great Britain is good enough for the people of Hongkong.

To quote Abraham Lincoln once again, "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves."

A CONCERNED RESIDENT