

A challenging new session

The new session of Legislative Council to be opened today by the Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, ushers in not only a busy and challenging legislative programme but heightened public interest in the new membership and the effect they may have upon proceedings and ultimately the responsiveness of our Government.

Undoubtedly new personalities, bringing with them a more candid and critical approach, should help to make question time and debates more lively and spirited.

But the new appointments were not made simply to put zest into the council meetings, necessary though that may be, but to bring a much wider cross-section of views and opinions to the Government.

Many feel that the council is still not sufficiently representative. Indeed it would be absurd to argue that perfection has been achieved in one set of appointments. Even in elected parliaments it is difficult to claim that true and fair representation of the entire population is achieved.

A frequently quoted anomaly in the British general election in 1974 was the disparity between the percentage of votes cast for the Liberal Party (18.3 per cent) and the members elected (13) while minor parties polled 6.6 per cent of votes yet obtained a total of 27 seats.

No system is perfect and each community must seek to achieve what is best for all within its adopted constitutional framework.

Dr Denny Huang argues for an element of elected members and while this might give a greater semblance of "representativeness" there are other ways of achieving such a balance without elections.

In a small council such as Hongkong's the real need is not to achieve a Babel of disparate voices but to create a team which in spite of its diversity of views can work together to produce effective legislation for the general good.

While the lone "voice of conscience" commands respect in any parliament what Hongkong needs is an infusion of informed and articulate opinion in closer contact with the average citizen in his various situations, and which is in turn capable of advising the Government what is and what is not acceptable to the people.

Getting the right mix of Unofficials will clearly not be achieved all at once but will be a continuous long-term process and it may be assumed that diversification of background and identity will be the prime objective of all future new appointments to Legco.

Hongkong has been fortunate in the quality of its Unofficial representation in recent years and the dedication they have shown and it can only be hoped that the better and wider balance of opinion achieved in the new members will result in more effective government in future.

They may be sure their progress will be followed with close and critical public interest. And while headlines and television appearances may come relatively easily, it is their capacity for hard work and clear thinking inside and outside the council which will do most to boost their reputation.