

A conservative rebel with a cause

BY DENISE WONG

DESPITE spending much of her youth as a rebel engaged in countless demonstrations for social reform, appointed legislator Professor Felice Lieh-mak classifies herself a "conservative" these days.

However, the head of the Hongkong University's Department of Psychiatry can hardly conceal her delight when she recalls her days as a student activist, even though it led to her expulsion from a secondary school.

"I felt the Catholic nuns at my school (in the Philippines) were unfair and corrupt. The more a couple donated to them (the nuns), the better their children were dealt with at school," Prof Lieh-mak said. "So I organised a student protest against them."

Prof Lieh-mak did not lose her zest for battle during her later school life and continued her activities while studying medicine in Britain in the early '60s.

She supported many causes in college and demonstrated against the issues at the time, including the Marcos government in the Philippines and the US presence in Vietnam.

She was also actively involved in fighting for social reforms and says her studies in this area are responsible for her "conservative" attitude in politics now.

"History shows that it is easy to conduct social revolution to destroy the existing establishment. But it is far more difficult to build up a better establishment afterwards," she said.

Prof Lieh-mak believes that by becoming part of the establishment, she can work from the inside for social reforms.

She believes that Hongkong does not have enough time to achieve full democracy before the hand-over in 1997.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

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"If we want to have a fully elected legislature, we should have started the work 10 years ago so we would have the opportunity to correct any mistakes," she said.

"The ideal society is one in which the people can have equal opportunity to improve their living," she said.

Prof Lieh-mak's heavy workload as a legislator prompted her to give up her title of dean of the university's medical faculty.

But she says she does not regret her move into the political arena, which was prompted by "a sense of having owed Hongkong some-

thing" after 23 years in the territory.

"Hongkong has given me my husband. It has also offered me - an imported worker - numerous development opportunities, although I have to put in great effort too," she said.

She met her husband Gregory Mak, a well-known construction businessman, when she worked at the Castle Peak Hospital after completing her studies in Britain.

She originally planned to stay for one year in Hongkong before starting a teaching job at Yale University in the US.

However Mr Mak swept her off her feet and has succeeded in keeping her in the territory ever since. They plan to stay after 1997.

"He (Mr Mak) said he would not leave," she said.

Prof Lieh-mak and her family have an "agreement" over her political career.

The terms are that all family members stay at home on Sundays, and no interviews or family photo sessions for the press are allowed.

Although she does find it difficult to juggle her roles as academic, wife, mother and politician, Prof Lieh-mak has only "broken the rules" once during her five-month legislative career.

That occasion was the weekend she attended the Co-operative Resources Centre's meeting in Macau on 11 and 12 January.