

# Abstain call on reforms to fail

By CHRIS YEUNG  
and FUNG WAI-KONG

A CALL for the three government officials in the Legislative Council to abstain in the crucial vote on the electoral reform proposals next week will be rejected.

This is despite strong lobbying by the Liberal Party for the Government to leave the issue solely in the hands of the 56 elected and appointed members.

Party chairman Allen Lee Peng-fei is to raise the demand in a meeting with Governor Chris Patten next Monday, two days before what has been dubbed "the Great Debate" on June 29.

The three votes of the *ex-officio* members may be crucial in deciding whether the amendments championed by the Liberal Party will defeat the package proposed by Mr Patten.

The party maintained the constitutional reform was so important that it should be decided by Legco. The three *ex-officio* mem-

■ LEGISLATORS urged officials to press Britain to clear up doubts over the validity of the 125 laws passed since John Swaine replaced the Governor as Legco president last year.

They appealed to the Executive Council to discuss the issue at today's meeting.

Andrew Wong Wang-fat, chairman of the Legco Constitutional Development Panel, said he would table an urgent private notice question to follow up the issue if the Government failed to take prompt measures.

However, the Deputy Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Leung Chin-man, said he could not make such a commitment. He agreed to reflect legislators' suggestions to his superiors and the British Government.

The *Sunday Morning Post* revealed that a clerical blunder at the Foreign Office had caused the amendment of the Letters Patent and Royal Instructions, enabling Mr Swaine to replace the Governor as the president of Legco, to miss essential procedures necessary to become law.

This, according to some constitutional experts, put legislation passed under Mr Swaine's presidency in doubt.

bers merely represented the Government, it said.

Vice-chairman Selina Chow Liang Shuk-ye said Mr Patten had pledged that Legco should make the final decision on the electoral bill. He should keep his word, she said.

The officials should not take part in the vote because "they represented only the colonial Governor", said Mrs Chow.

Another Liberal Party

legislator, Howard Young, said the three officials should abstain on the bill and its amendments.

He said other parties were welcome to join the call for the three officials not to vote.

"It will be a disgrace to the British if the political reform is decided by the votes of the three *ex-officio* members at the end of the voting," said another party leader.

The call, however, was rejected by the United Democrats.

The Government position was that there should be no distinction between *ex-officio* members and other legislators in the law-making body given the fact that they had the "same duties and responsibilities".

The administration is adamant that it would "not be acceptable" for the *ex-officio* members to abstain on certain issues.

The Government had a view on the electoral reform and was standing firm.

United Democrats spokesman Yeung Sum said the logic of the demand by the Liberal Party was strange.

"The three *ex-officio* members are part of Legco. They vote on the Budget and laws. As part of the system, it should not be changed in accordance with the possibility of whether their votes will make a change to the result of voting," he said.

"It would only create instability in the system."