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A monopoly that must be broken...

IN his devastating attack upon bureaucratic inefficiency and flagrant waste of the British taxpayers' money, "Your Disobedient Servant," Leslie Chapman has written:

"The standard civil service responses to criticism are as follows:

"First, dead silence; do nothing. By tomorrow or the next day the newspaper or the politician will fix their attention elsewhere. This is an effective defence and many senior civil servants are temperamentally suited to practise it.

"Second: courageous silence. This may be used if the first kind of silence does not work. The objective here is to give the impression that only because the full story cannot be told is the criticism being left unchallenged. If an impression can be given of tight-lipped, unflinching acceptance of unjust treatment from that very public which this reticence protects, so much the better...

"Third: 'We are not perfect but we are willing to learn.' This line is comparatively new, but is increasingly common. It is particularly suitable for radio and television interviews, provided they are not the kind where journalists and such are allowed to spoil things with questions. It requires a relaxed approach (to show that on the whole all is well) coupled with fleeting recognition that the situation could be better, even though not significantly."

The point of this letter is to relate this criticism to a single aspect of Government policy in Hongkong: its support for the British Airways monopoly.

I am sure that you do not require to be reminded, Sir, that more than a year has passed since your leading article entitled "Time to break

London's grip" (SCM Post, March 11).

Let it be said at once that any of us who have experience of a British Labour Government must have strong sympathy with those who argue against its narrow, selfish interests and those of its trade union supporters.

We know how badly the Wilson and Callaghan Governments have dealt with Hongkong at the EEC discussions, and their contempt for our wish to set up our own shipping register.

We know how deeply repugnant to a majority of British expatriates is the southern African policy of the young Dr David Owen, who combines appeasement towards the Russian hegemonists with his own ambitions for a seat on the National Executive of the Labour Party.

We know that we are unpopular with Labour sympathisers on account of our hard work and our thrift, and that one of their number once said that Hongkong stood for everything that "the movement" detests.

But none of this excuses the failure of our negotiators to work actively, and to be seen to work actively, in the interest of Hongkong citizens and taxpayers. We are tired of BA's monopoly of cheap flights to Britain. The complaints must surely be heard even by Leslie Chapman's "disobedient servants."

We know that Sir Freddie Laker services his planes in Hongkong. Why are they allowed to fly out empty? Why cannot this home of free enterprise break the monopoly of the British nationalised airline and support British free enterprise?

Now, of course, negotiations may soon be made

easy by the return of a Conservative Government in Britain. The Conservatives have indeed promised to investigate the selling off of nationalised industries, or parts of them, including British Airways, to private investors.

Undoubtedly, however, Hongkong should move quickly to offer alternative cheap flights to its citizens, as the trade unions concerned are already threatening chaos if the cause of free enterprise is thus advanced.

The following opinions might be of more interest to our administrators than the incessant complaints of air passengers. Mr Howard Phelps, BA's personnel director, referred recently to the fact that between July last year and January, there had been 66 unofficial stoppages and 53 other forms of industrial action. He referred to a state of "near anarchy" in the airline.

And, second, Britain's Civil Aviation Authority reported: "BA has not done all that it could properly be expected to have done to maintain or improve the efficiency of its operations or the quality of its services on domestic routes in the last three years."

What possibly can be the arguments for not making a fight of it? Or shall we, as individuals, be forced to take our complaints away from the hands of our servants in the Government and go direct to what we must pray will be a new British Government, vastly more sympathetic to the aspirations of Hongkong people in this and so many other matters?

CONSERVATIVE