

# Archbishop seeks democracy push

THE Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood, will today make a dramatic call to speed up democracy and introduce a fully directly elected legislature in Hongkong.

During a debate on the territory at the Church of England General Synod in England, the Archbishop will speak of his fears for the spiritual and material well being of its residents.

In a heavily political speech, of which the *Sunday Morning Post* has been given an exclusive advance copy, Dr Habgood also touches on the sensitive issues of passports and the Vietnamese boat people.

His comments will not be well received by the Chinese and may raise questions in Britain about the church's continuing involvement in politics.

The synod will request that the British Government "takes all steps to sustain the confidence of the people of Hongkong in the rule of law and administration of justice.

"Move more quickly towards its declared desire of introducing directly elected government in Hongkong.

"Makes available within the budget further financial and educational resources to promote a democratic climate in Hongkong."

Dr Habgood led a fact-finding British Council of Churches delegation to the territory in 1990. He has also

By PETER WOOLRICH



Dr John Habgood: a political speech.

spoken on the nationality bill in the House of Lords.

Explaining the reasons for the debate, he will say: "It is important for the churches in Hongkong to have some visible pledge that we are concerned about them, that we understand their anxieties, and that we are not going to abandon them in 1997.

"There is great interest in this debate, and they will be listening hard to what we say."

Dr Habgood says there are half a million Christians in the territory, who are responsible for running 731 schools, 11 hospitals, 174 social service centres, as well as homes for the elderly and centres for the mentally handicapped.

He says the church plays a key role in the social fabric of Hongkong society and con-

tributes "immensely" to the quality of life of the people.

Commenting on the divide between the material and the spiritual, he says: "It [Hongkong] is attractive because it is a commercial success story.

"That success has depended to a large extent on the freedom given to the business community to control the conditions of life and employment, and the social strains which this induces have mostly been taken up in a rising tide of expectations.

"About half of the social services have been left in the hands of religious bodies.

"Democracy has been weak because the commercial interests have feared the loss of their freedom, and the huge numbers of immigrant workers have come from regimes where they have already had too much politics."

Delving into economics, he continues: "But as 1997 approaches these interactions begin to create a downward spiral instead of an upward one.

"The emigration of business leaders depresses confidence and removes initiative. The social needs of those who do not see themselves being lifted up on a rising tide of prosperity, begin to increase.

"The pressure for more democratic control is fuelled by this loss of confidence in the system, and by the fears of Chinese autocracy, and is of course being fiercely resisted

by the Chinese Government."

Dr Habgood contends the church has suffered as much as the business community from the brain drain, and has been left supporting "huge" social institutions which could become "an increasing burden and distraction".

He and other church leaders met the Governor, Mr Chris Patten, in London, and discussed some of the issues.

"There are fine political judgements to be made about how far it is wise or helpful to go beyond the agreements already made with China," Dr Habgood says.

On the nationality issue, he says: "We need to be aware of how deeply hurtful our legislation on nationality has been to those who hitherto have always seen themselves as British citizens.

"When we were there in 1990 people laughed at the idea of a huge influx of Chinese into Britain. After the freedom of Hongkong, British society seems extraordinarily unattractive.

"Their eyes were on Canada and Australia. What they wanted was the legitimization a British passport would give them."

Dr Habgood, who has advocated forced repatriation of the boat people, concludes his speech with reference to the Vietnamese. "Tens of thousands of people still live in overcrowded camps in a kind of political limbo. It is important not to forget them."