

PWC.  
Civil Servants - China  
Transition  
self

# A new phase begins as the three tiers move out

NOW that the National People's Congress has adopted the necessary resolution to dismantle the three-tier political structure in mid-1997 and install a new one, an important phase in the preparation of the Special Administrative Region government is over.

A new phase can be expected to begin soon. Those wondering what this next stage might be will find it useful to look more closely at the work of the Civil Service study group set up under the Preliminary Working Committee (PWC).

In coming weeks enlistment into its ranks is likely to gain momentum. All those who have joined so far are retired civil servants or

officers who have recently resigned. Although no serving officers have enlisted, there appears to be no rules barring them — at least not from the PWC. On the administration's side there is a ban on official contacts, but nothing to stop them from dealing with the PWC on an individual and personal basis.

One interpretation is that there is nothing to stop the individual from joining the study group. But it might be frowned upon.

This certainly raises the issue of loyalty. However, the question which may be asked is: Loyalty to what? If the first loyalty of our civil servants must be to Hong Kong, then working closely with the next

Staff Column

Jackie Sam



government cannot possibly be against Hong Kong's interest.

It would, in fact, be very much in the interest of Hong Kong people that this should happen, since those civil servants who are going to stay on past 1997 and into the next century will have to help plan the future as well as any contingencies

which may arise during the final weeks of the transfer of sovereignty.

The complete break with Britain on political matters affecting Hong Kong implies the derailment of a "through train" for the civil service as well. China's top officials have already ruled out discussions with Britain on the top civil service appointments of the Special Administrative Region.

So, it can be said that those serving officers who join the study group will be boarding the train before it reaches the 1997 "border" while those who work closely with it without joining in may be likened to prospective passengers making an early booking for the passage to the SAR.

In the present climate there may be deep frowns, even anger, over this. But, from the PWC point of view, it would make the selection of top officers that much easier. The study group could be their mechanism for separating those civil servants who will remain in the service beyond 1997 and those who will leave — without anyone being required to declare his or her intentions.

Since the PWC will be the core of the SAR Preparatory Committee and since the committee is now entrusted with the job of setting up the SAR, those civil servants who join the study group will be helping in this task.

There is an immense amount of work to be done. Drafting the necessary laws to give effect to the SAR requires considerable civil service input.

Blueprints have to be worked out to deal with likely exigencies like a mass departure of officers from the police force, even from the service itself.

If the occasion of the transfer is to be marked by celebrations, civil servants will have to be involved before 1997. And, of course, there is to be the World Bank conference just after the changeover.

The big question is whether there will be obstructions in the way of the study group in coming months.

HONG KONG STANDARD  
3 SEP 1994