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## A CIVIC BANDWAGON

THE Kowloon City District has just launched a year-long civic education campaign aimed at arousing, in its residents, an awareness of their duty to join in public affairs and to improve, among other things, their environment, to help build a better society.

Other activities in the coming months will include a courtesy campaign, civic awareness scheme, model student award and outstanding citizen award — all geared toward exhorting residents to show concern for the community.

Not to be outdone, other urban and rural districts are also flexing their muscles and organising similar activities.

Their District Boards have formed working groups under their Community Building Committees to organise civic education programmes with the similar objective: to make Hongkong a better place to live in for the present and the future. This is to take into account the social and political changes, that are already happening here in the run-up to 1997, and that the face of Hongkong will change further as this deadline approaches.

Coinciding with all these district activities is a new programme, "Information '86," comprising 14 episodes that Radio Television Hongkong (RTHK) will be broadcasting from now till next March, targetted for the young and old of the community to stimulate their civic awareness.

With the Education Department also intensifying its civic education activities in schools, young people are suddenly being swamped with civic education programmes. Consequently, they should emerge more oriented toward the subject, although carping critics say that such indoctrination won't be effective as youngsters resent having anything foisted on them. And we are inclined to agree with this view.

The Education Department last August put out a booklet, "Guidelines for Civic Education", to drive home the theme of the importance of civic education to schools, teachers and students. But the booklet was severely criticised for its political overtones. One critic unfairly went so far as to brand it as 'a package of nonsense,' as it was nothing more than an attempt at the socialisation of children from kindergarten to upper secondary; so it was a device for inculcating government propaganda and had little to do with the teaching of civic education.

In reply to this barrage of criticism, an Education Department spokesman

admitted that "Guidelines" was politically oriented because of the future problem and that if this problem did not exist there would be no need to promote civic education.

This, of course, is not saying anything new. We all know that Hongkong is changing because of 1997. One educationalist pointed out that it would be more correct for teachers to know what political slogans, such as "Hongkong people ruling Hongkong", actually mean before they start teaching youngsters who should know the meaning of these words.

Hence the role of teachers is of paramount importance. Students must be made to see the nuances of the future Hongkong political-social scenario, and within the context of 1997, this means that civic education should spell out the relationship between people and society and promote a sense of identification.

Even among educationalists, the phrase "civic education" is interpreted differently. Dr Byron Weng, head of the Department of Government and Public Administration, Hongkong Chinese University, for instance, said that civic education "means preparing citizens of the future society to accept the mixed system of socialism and capitalism, based on China's "one country, two systems", that would apply to Hongkong when it becomes a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under China.

Students should thus be made to think for themselves rather than be fed with platitudes. Hongkong, after all, is a free society, and will continue to be so, and this has enabled Hongkong to prosper; China fully realises that we are a different breed. Teachers, thus, have to keep students "abreast of the development of the political culture" as it develops if we are to have an enlightened community in the future, not a benighted one.

Many schools have taken their own initiative to display topical "Basic Law" articles on their Civic Education Notice Boards, underlining their concern.

We understand that civic education seminars and extra-curricular activities, organised by schools in conjunction with the Education Department, have been popular because attendance is voluntary, not compulsory.

Courses teach people how to become responsible citizens, as the first step toward acquiring knowledge of Hongkong's political and historical development, leading to 1997. And this, we think, is the right thing to do.