

# Aid to the Kuk

THE social services provided by non-government agencies is playing an ever increasing role in the daily life of Hongkong. But they all suffer from the same complaint - too little money.

The Government in many cases helps by subsidising them, but until fairly recently they relied mostly on contributions from abroad. Unfortunately for Hongkong, the Colony is now considered in the eyes of many people abroad to be self-supporting and what money arrives in the Colony to help the needy has dwindled to a mere trickle.

Because of this social agencies have to rely more and more on subsidies from the Community Chest, an autocratic organisation that dispenses money donated by various businesses, organisations and private donations as though its taipan board had gone out and earned the money themselves.

New contracts have been sent to recipients of subsidies telling them what they cannot do and that their money will be stopped if they dare to disobey. Naturally the agencies are up in arms, firstly because they are not sure whether the don'ts are legitimate. Social welfare covers a multitude of facets. And secondly because they do not consider it the place of the board of the Community Chest to issue dictatorial orders and conditions on how each individual agency should behave in order to obtain a subsidy.

In the light of this Hongkong's private social welfare agencies are going to need all the help they can get from direct private donations.

It is not often that this newspaper supports any particular social welfare agency preferring to point out needs or discrepancies as a whole rather than to particularise. But under the circumstances the case of the Po Leung Kuk warrants special mention. The Kuk is very short of money and is desperately in need of help. The work of the Kuk is to look after unwanted or orphaned children.

In this way are filling a definite need and providing, to the best of their ability, a home for the waifs and strays of Hongkong. Apart from purely monetary donations there is one scheme run by the Kuk that is worth thinking about. This is the sponsorship scheme whereby for \$600 a year it is possible to "adopt" one of the 638 children ranging in ages from a couple of years to teenagers.

The scheme started in 1961, but seems to have had little publicity. It works this way. A sponsor can pay a lump sum or a part of the \$600 even down to a mere \$50 a month to help pay part of the cost of keeping a particular child. The sponsor is allowed to pick the child to be sponsored and is allowed to take the child to his or her home during holidays. In this way a bond is established between the sponsor and the child and the child is given the opportunity to enjoy a little home life.

The benefits arising from this cut both ways for the child and the sponsor. The child is given the much needed knowledge that someone really cares.

The sponsor receives the love and affection of the child and a new purpose in life.

Because of this the Kuk's sponsorship programme deserves a better response than it is getting now. It is doing well, but not well enough. At the moment there are about 300 sponsors taking care of a little less than half the children in the Kuk. Most of those sponsored are tiny mites and the older children are ignored. Perhaps it is because they are beginning to develop and have characters of their own. But even so they too deserve a chance to have someone demonstrate that they care for them.

The people of Hongkong have always stood by when disaster has struck and their generosity in these circumstances is a bye-word. Disaster has struck these children and they too need the compassion that is readily available for disaster-hit areas.