

# Amendment to Post Office Bill comes under fire

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**BUSINESSMEN** support the need for an updated Post Office Bill, but not in its present amended version which they believe will severely affect Hongkong's business communications with the outside world.

The Hongkong General Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese Manufacturers Association and shipping companies such as Royal Inter-ocean Lines, said yesterday that the second reading of the Bill, scheduled for

October 27, should be postponed for a few more months to allow more time for discussion with the Government to resolve the issue.

Mr Martin Fairbairn of Fairbairn, Kwok and Wang, solicitors advising the Post Office Bill Campaign Ad-Hoc Committee, said the proposed amendments to the Bill giving exemptions to certain categories of commercial documents sent by air freight and air courier service, were too restrictive and not wide enough.

In addition there were glaring absences in the list of exemptions offered by the Government. He said it was physically impossible to

cover all forms of commercial documents under a schedule of 12 headings as proposed.

He said they had offered three proposals to the Postmaster-General, Mr M. Addi.

The first was to stick with the original definition of a letter as consisting of only current and personal correspondence and exclude the sending of commercial correspondence.

The second proposal was that if the Government insisted on having a schedule of exemption forms for commercial correspondence which could be sent by other means, then general headings should be used instead of a detailed list.

"It's impossible to list every conceivable head of document under such a schedule," he said.

The third suggestion was that if the Postmaster-General wanted to make up for the revenue lost as a result of commercial documents being sent by air freight and air courier services, then business groups would be prepared to pay a special surcharge or tax for the right to go on using air freight and courier services for their commercial documents.

Fairbairn said that Addi, through the Umelco office, had said that the idea of a surcharge or tax had been rejected but did not say why.

Furthermore Addi had made it clear at the last meeting with Umelco this month that he had already made significant concessions in the way of allowing a schedule of exemptions to the Bill.

He stressed that they were not opposing the need for an updated version of the Post Office Bill which was drafted in 1926, but were concerned that any provisions in the new Bill would not severely affect the whole range of business operations in Hongkong which depended upon speedy communications with the outside world.

"The last thing we want is to stop this Bill. In fact we support the need for an up-to-date Bill. From research we know exactly what is required in the Bill and if Government is willing to come to discuss this with us, we can reach an agreement within one month and have the Bill passed within three months," he said.

The Postmaster-General yesterday refused to comment on the various proposals.