

Call for larger Urbco electorate

THE Government should enlarge the Urban Council electorate, expand the council's scope of authority and raise the ratio of elected members against appointed members as measures to make the council election a more worthy one.

This appeal came from Urban Councillor Dr Denny Huang while he was speaking before a Rotary Club meeting yesterday.

Noting that Urbco is so far the only government organisation in Hongkong with elected representatives, Dr Huang said he resented that the system has not worked to the public's expectations and indeed many people regard it as a farce.

He said both the Government and the urban councillors themselves had responsibility for the failure of Hongkong's only system of democracy through election.

To save the system, Dr Huang proposed that the Government should enlarge the electorate for the Urbco by first automatically registering all 300,000 eligible electors and thereafter extending the franchise to include all people aged 21 or above who have resided in Hongkong for more than five years.

At the moment, 23 categories of people

totalling 300,000 are eligible for voting. Only 34,000 of them cared to register as voters last year.

To encourage more able people to stand for election, Dr. Huang suggested that the Government should follow the British pattern to expand the scope of the council as a local authority.

He branded the existing council as hardly more than a sanitary board further entrusted with some cultural and recreational affairs.

Dr. Huang also proposed that the Government should honour its agreement in 1966 to increase elected seats in the Urbco and at the same time reducing the appointed ones so as to eventually make all seats elective.

The Urbco is made up of 12 appointed and 12 elected members.

"As the members of the appointed camp are usually united while the elected members are divided into several groups, it is obvious that the appointed members are almost always running the show," said Dr Huang.

He criticised that many elected urban councillors often place personal or group interest over and above the interests of the public.

There has been flat refusal by elected members to form a united front in the election of the chairman of the council and other relevant matters, and unlike the appointed members, they also objected to the idea of a monthly meeting among the elected members themselves, said Dr Huang.

As a result, not only did the chairmanship of the council go to the appointed members, but even the vice-chairman at the past two elections was chosen by the appointed members, he said.

"The appointed side can often exert heavy influence on the election of chairman and vice-chairman of the various select committees. Thus, for the current year the appointed side chaired seven out of 13 committees and had eight vice-chairmen," Dr Huang pointed out.

He went on to say that some elected members' deeds did not tally with their words.

"One political group, which has a large number of hawkers as members and often posed as their protectors, were the ones who had proposed a sweeping increase in hawkers' licence fees," said Dr Huang.

He called upon the elected urban councillors to remedy these problems with actions.