

S. A. M. P.

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101 MPs back elected council

By ROSEMARY LANGFORD

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A motion proposing a fully elected Urban Council in Hongkong with wider powers has 101 supporters in the House of Commons.

The motion also asked for universal franchise before the next elections to the council and direct elections to the Legislative Council.

And in reply to a question tabled yesterday in the House of Commons, the Lord Privy Seal said he has received no objections from China to such reforms to the Urban Council and in the fields of social welfare, labour and civil rights.

The question was asked by Mr Robert Parry, a Labour MP from Liverpool.

The motion asking for democratic reform in Hongkong said the House welcomes the visit of four elected Urban Councillors to Britain and supports their proposals for change as outlined in their pamphlet.

It urged the Government

to implement the four main proposals.

It rejected the view that these proposals are not feasible due to any objection from China, Hongkong's special circumstances or any other reason.

The motion also said that on the contrary, opposition to democratic reform has originated from and only benefited big business interests in Hongkong.

Aside from the 101 Labour MPs, it has also been signed by one Welsh nationalist.

Six questions were tabled altogether on Hongkong for answer today.

In answer to another question by Mr Parry, the Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, said she had received a letter from representatives of elected members of the Urban Council asking her to meet a delegation.

She said the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Peter Blaker, saw the delegation on her behalf and discussed their proposals.

But Mr Blaker told the House that the powers of the Urban Council are primarily a matter for the Hongkong Government to decide.

In answer to another question earlier in the week from Mr Bob Cryer on whether the Lord Privy Seal will take steps to raise standards of safety in employment and trade union rights in Hongkong, Mr Blaker said these are also matters for the Hongkong Government.

"The progress being made in these fields is illustrated by the steadily increasing number of international labour organisation conventions being held in the territory," Mr Blaker said.

"Hongkong's record compares favourably with that of any country in the region."

Meanwhile, the delegation of four Urban Councillors report they have ended their week's lobbying in an optimistic mood.

They have already sent copies of a pamphlet setting out their suggestions to Mrs Thatcher, Lord Carrington, Chairman Hua Guofeng care of the Chinese Embassy and

all the MPs.

Mrs Elsie Elliott, Mrs Cecilia Yeung, Dr Denny Huang and Mr Tsin Sai-nin said they feel cheered by the reception from the MPs and Foreign Office officials they have talked to.

Today the four met 25 Labour MPs.

The low turnout of MPs was thought by some to be because an important public expenditure discussion was taking place in the House at the same time.

Mrs Elliott told the MPs: "We feel these proposals are not merely overdue but of vital importance now."

"Without some improvement along these lines, public confidence in the Hongkong Government will be eroded to zero."

"The situation in Hongkong is already very tense and unless real democratic institutions are created to express the will of the people, disorder and even riots could erupt," she said.

Later this evening, Mr Parry — who declared himself an anti-colonialist when he visited Hongkong recently — will attend a reception in the House of Commons for Chairman Hua.

He said he hopes to have the chance to put the views of the delegation to Chairman Hua "in a diplomatic manner."

"I thought the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Blaker, was more receptive than usual," Mrs Elliott said.

"I pointed out that we now have an educated young and it is for them we must have reform."

She is also pressing for the Public Order Ordinance to be rescinded.

"It is like political imprisonment," she said.

Mrs Elliott said the delegation is pleased it has had no opposition from the other Tories.

A letter from No 10 Downing Street in answer to her letter stating the case for reform said "the documents had been read with great interest."

Next Friday, the delegation will see the chairman of the Anglo-Hongkong Parliamentary Group, Sir Paul Bryan.

"I think we've achieved what we sought to achieve," Mrs Elliott said.