

*W. B. R. P.*

*J. C. M. P.*

*21 Feb. 1980*

# Blaker says 'No' to political reform

The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Peter Blaker, who is responsible for Hongkong, rejected suggestions for political reform in the Colony during question time in the House of Commons yesterday.

Replying to questions from Liverpool Labour Member of Parliament, Mr Robert Parry, Mr Blaker said the Hongkong Government had no plans to give more power and authority to the Urban Council.

He also said he would not request the Hongkong Government to introduce elections to the Legislative Council in a way similar to the system now operating in Macau.

And he said that he would not consider seeking to lower the age for voting in Urban Council elections to 18.

Mr Blaker said that he was considering the submissions made by a group of Urban Councillors who are pressing for democratic elections to the council.

He would comment further in due course, Mr Blaker said. Mr Parry also asked whether the Hongkong Government had received representations from bodies calling for more democratic reform of the Urban Council.

He was told that "no formal, direct representations" have been made in the last year.

Angry reaction to Mr Blaker's answers came swiftly from Mrs Elsie Elliott, long-time campaigner for political reform in Hongkong.

"I didn't expect anything different from Mr Blaker," she said.

"He seems to believe in democracy for Britain, and he has the impudence to stand up for democracy in Rhodesia, so why not in Hongkong?"

Mrs Elliott is currently stoking another campaign for sweeping changes in the ground-rules that govern Hongkong politics.

# Urbco's rebels to make new appeal to London

Rebel members of the Urban Council are again taking their case for tax, land and other reforms to Members of Parliament in London.

A petition calling for rent control on business and commercial premises, tax allowances for low-paid workers and the scaling down of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, among other suggestions, is being

sent to about 100 Hongkong organisations by the three Reform Club and four Independent Urban Councillors.

The statement of appeal to the MP's and an explanatory letter seeking public support have been signed by Mrs Elsie Elliott and Mr Brook Bernacchi.

The letter notes that chairmen of some associations already have signed the statement.

Mrs Elliott said later that

support had come from between 20 and 30 of the groups contacted.

"We are still waiting for replies from some of them, and others are suggesting amendments," she said.

But among those who have already responded to the statement are what Mrs Elliott calls "a true cross-section of Hongkong."

It includes Government trade unions, bodies representing social workers, teachers, hawkers, mini-bus operators, and some commercial organisations.

"The statement will be taken or posted to Members of Parliament in the near future.

"It is hoped that this united effort will help towards a better understanding of the needs of the people of Hongkong and serve as a guide to more responsive and representative government," the letter said.

The statement said "the unrepresentative system of Government in Hongkong results in many unjust policies being formulated" and listed several matters that need urgent attention.

Some of the items recommended for change include the Government's land and tax policies and composition of advisory bodies to the Government.

Saying that the Government's policy is to raise the highest possible revenue from land by releasing it infrequently, the statement's authors add that:

"Speculation must be curbed, a crash housing programme must be introduced

for all classes of people and rents must be controlled, not only on all domestic tenancies but also on business and commercial tenancies."

Personal and family income tax allowances must be doubled to help those at the bottom end of the salary scale.

"This measure would reduce the wide gap between rich and poor, which at present is ever-widening."

All advisory bodies to the Government should include representatives of the people concerned, so that they can make their views known, the statement said.

The Government spends vast sums on public relations, according to the statement, and should cut down on wasteful spending.

"For example, a vast amount is spent by the office of the Commissioner for Hongkong in London to misrepresent the facts about Hongkong to the British people.

"Other departments, such as the Independent Commission Against Corruption, should be cut down to a small Prevention of Corruption body, to avoid wasting public money."

An Urban Councillor, Miss Maria Tam, said she and Mr Bernacchi may take the petition, plus signatures to England, if there is a good response from the associations contacted.

Late last year four other councillors went to London and obtained support for a fully elected Urban Council with wider powers from 101 Members of the House of Commons.