

J. C. M. P.

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# Aim for territory-wide council

THE present territory of Hongkong is mainly made up of three parts — Hongkong Island, which was ceded in 1842 by the treaty of Nanking; Kowloon Peninsula (as far as Boundary Street and including Stonecutters' Island) by the convention of Peking; and the New Territories (including New Kowloon and the islands around Hongkong Island), which was leased for a period of 99 years in 1898. All these only make Hongkong a no-bigger-than-1,100 km city, anyway.

The pace of Hongkong's growth is surprisingly rapid that it today has a population of more than five million residents. The old system of government has proved to be unable to meet the general will of the people well enough. It has been realised that elected bodies of some sort to collect public opinion is urgently needed.

Eighteen district boards, which, unprecedentedly, consist of elected members was created in 1982. Nevertheless, its work is just advisory. They can only advise on matters affecting the well-being of people living and working in the district; provision and use of public facilities and services within the district; adequacy and priorities of Government programmes for the district; use of public funds allocated to the district for local public works and community activities, as well as undertake, where funds are available, minor environmental improvements within the district; and promotion of recreational and cultural activities within the district.

Each district board advises its corresponding district management committee on matters within its terms of reference. So there are still a few more levels to go before the advice of these boards reaches the central government.

But, admittedly, it is an effort by the Government to open up a channel which is rather close to the general public for the purpose of collecting our opinion.

In view of the complete lack of financial and administrative powers of the district boards, the so-called "district administration scheme" can hardly be seen as successful.

As time goes by, every individual district will

definitely grow. The proposal to increase the number of elected members of every board is, therefore, necessary.

Indeed, it is always expected that the district boards would become more representative.

In the New Territories, the growth of population is much faster because of the continuous development of new towns. It is sensible to predict that by the year 1991, the population of the New Territories will surpass that of urban Hongkong. It is a natural outcome of the redistribution of population. This in turn will provide an argument for the creation of another regional council to manage what the Urban Council is responsible for in the urban areas.

An Urbco-like council in the New Territories is no doubt a pressing need. Once "urbanisation" is almost completed there, however, the work of the proposed council will nearly be the same as that of the existing Urban Council.

Then environmental, cultural and recreational facilities and services will be demanded in a similar manner.

Actually, it is not so impossible to expand the present Urbco to accommodate also members from the New Territories to manage the whole city.

If the Government insists on its plans to establish two separate councils, it has first to draw the boundary. It has made it clear that the controversial Boundary Street would not be the "boundary."

In the sense of the expiry of the New Territories leasehold, any division of Hongkong will be misleading and bound to cause speculation — the Chinese land is confined to the north, whereas the British to the south.

In fact, any unwise decision can stir up apprehension again at this moment in time.

Besides the avoidance of speculation, there are still a great deal of advantages which the establishment of solely one municipal council, instead of two regional councils, will offer. It would be agreed that one municipal council could help to minimise duplication of power, conflicts of interest and financial wastage as well.

Yet, there are still differences between the New Territories and the urban. Therefore, I suggest:

- Two temporary regional councils be set up to look after the urban and the New Territories respectively.

- The two councils be merged into a municipal council to be responsible for Hongkong, as a whole, as soon as the New Territories have been urbanised.

- The present 18 district boards each choose two of their elected members to sit in the proposed municipal council, leaving the other 18 members appointed so as to maintain a two-to-one ratio between the elected and appointed members in the council.

Very obviously, such a change would provide a simple structure.

First, there would only be one single district board election every three or four years, then. It is definite that it will minimise inconvenience to both candidates and voters.

Second, the complex relationships between the district boards and Urban Council can become more understandable. And any re-elections of district board members because they are elected Urbco members can later be totally avoided.

Last, the proposed municipal council could then be the principal agent to reflect opinion to the central government while the district boards could devote themselves to the role as collectors of opinion.

This implies that our opinion would be handled at two levels. It will be far more systematic and efficient.

In addition to the responsibility for hygiene, recreational and cultural activities and facilities, the proposed municipal body has to enhance its role as an advisory body.

At the same time, it must be offered both legislative and administrative rights eventually. It is the right time for the Government to lift its stress on "gradualism" and to lay more emphasis on "democratisation."

ERIC TANG