

## A new council for the NT

For 86 years the people of the New Territories have managed to survive without a regional council and many would say they are none the worse for it. Now in the twilight of British administration they have expressed an "overwhelming desire" to go it alone with a counterpart of the Urban Council. And the Government, by some undisclosed method of testing public opinion, has given its endorsement.

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Denis Bray, yesterday announced this new development which will mean yet another dose of elections for a territory that, though once starved of them, is now getting more than its fair share. It will mean, apart from setting up a forum for New Territories people to tackle their own municipal problems, an increase in the bureaucracy and the establishment of a further secretary in the top echelons of government.

While this may not please the Treasury with its eyes on cutting the cost of the public service, the political advantages may well be justified. It makes sense to have such a council, for in the next 16 years this will be our biggest growth area, with the new towns taking most of the population overspill.

If there is one quibble, however, it is the number of seats awarded to the Heung Yee Kuk. The worthies who represent the old interests of a rural establishment have little in common with the new townsmen. Yet they have prevailed on the Government to give them not only three ex-officio seats (which are surely enough) but a quarter of the appointed seats.

In other words, one sixth of the membership will be members of the HYK when in terms of the composition of the population their representation must be worth a lot less. We have no doubt they will do their best for all sectors of the territory. It is just in this democratic age, it would be nice to see them getting the endorsement of the popular vote.

It is noteworthy that while the Heung Yee Kuk and the district boards managed to win the Government's ear both to set up a separate council and not to tamper with the district board boundaries, Urban Councillors either lacked the eloquence or the persuasion and found their own representations dismissed.

However, we commend Mr Hilton Cheong-Leen's gracious concession to its formation bearing in mind the very strong reservations of members of his council. No doubt an enlarged Urban Council could have done the job equally as well, though there is a fair point in giving this big and important area, with some special problems of its own, a separate council.