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'Abandon flawed law, pressure groups demand

By JAMIE WALKER

Pressure groups opposing the controversial Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Bill will continue to push for it to be shelved, in spite of the amendments proposed yesterday.

The Government also faced widespread criticism last night for its handling of the affair.

Leaders of most law and political organisations which have protested against many of the Bill's provisions said the legislation is fundamentally flawed and should be held over until it can be reviewed in detail.

The honorary secretary of the Hongkong Bar Association, Mr Daniel Fung,

said he agreed with suggestions from some observers last night that the Bill should be scrapped.

"I feel there is some legitimacy to that point of view and it should be considered," he said.

The Bar Association is objecting primarily to Clause 24 of the Bill which, before amendment, provided that Legco or its members should not be subject to the jurisdiction of the courts in their exercise of power.

Mr Fung said: "It begs the question — who is to decide what is a lawful exercise of power of the council?"

"We still need to address the question of who or what is to decide what is lawful here."

It would be inappropriate, Mr Fung said, if the decision was left in the hands of Legco members and not entrusted to the courts.

Mr Fung said he was also disturbed that the system of Government by consultation in Hongkong had been tarnished by the bid to steamroll the Bill through Legco.

Mr Ian MacCallum, the chairman of the Hongkong Branch of Justice, condemned the amended Bill as a "bad piece of legislation which they have done a patchwork job on to try to make it better."

He said it should be shelved and reassessed by a select committee, similar to the group which had been empowered to review the Trial of Complex Commercial

Crimes Bill in April.

Mr MacCallum said the amendments proposed in Legco yesterday only went "half-way" in solving problems raised by the new Bill.

The chairman of the Hongkong Observers, who earlier this month called for the legislation to be scrapped, last night backed the move to defer its passage.

Dr Tony Ng said he was concerned that the Bill had contained obvious flaws when introduced.

"We have lost confidence in the Government and Legco to come up with a Bill that is logical and rational," he said.

The chairman of the Hongkong Policy Viewers organisation, Mr Sammy Chiu, said he was disappointed with the amend-

ments foreshadowed during the Legco debate.

"I feel many people are still not aware of some of the Bill's content," he said. "I would agree it should be shelved."

The Hongkong's Journalists' Association, which had branded the Bill a shackle on press freedom in Hongkong, last night welcomed the deletion of Clause 20.

But Dr Huang Chen-ya, president of the Hongkong Affairs Society, which first voiced concern over the Bill, said the Government should be given a chance to make the amendments work.

He said it should not be judged until the wording of the revised Bill could be evaluated.