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A force to be reckoned with

Pressure groups have a more positive role to play in discussions on Hongkong's future, according to a director of the ~~Christian Industrial~~ Committee, Mr Lau Chin-shick.

The fact that many pressure groups had not expressed their opinions on Hongkong's future did not necessarily mean they had none, said Mr Lau in an interview published in this month's edition of the committee's newsletter, *Change*.

And it would not be long before the British and Chinese governments began to listen in earnest to what pressure groups had to say.

Mr Lau said that Hongkong would eventually come to be administered by its own people.

"I do not believe that the British can continue to rule Hongkong forever. So much is certain," he said.

But three questions had to be answered before self-rule could become a reality.

First, would the Hongkong dollar remain an international currency after the British went?

Second, would Hongkong people "exert their strength to bring about change," or would they simply await the outcome of Sino-British negotiations?

And what group, organisation or political party could really represent the Hongkong people, act in their interests and be in their midst?

Mr Lau said: "As a long-term prospect, self-rule for Hongkong is an answer most people can accept.

"The question we have to examine is whether we can bring the majority of middle and lower class people to the point where they struggle, strive and hope for the same."

People's confidence could be increased if, over the next 14 years, efforts were made to improve their quality of life, to increase democratic rights and to fight for participation in politics, Mr Lau said.

But if there was no agreement on the people's needs, then people would opt for the status quo out of fear.

The introduction of democratic elections to district boards, the Urban Council and eventually even the Legislative Council, were or would be a transitional step, he said, but this would not in itself mean Hongkong's people attaining "political participation."

"If we put the focus of our efforts on this, what priority will be given to the quality of life?

"I do not believe that struggling for improvements in the quality of life, striving



Mr Lau

for a fair and just society is apolitical.

"If we proceed in this direction, we will eventually reach the point of political participation."

Mr Lau said pressure groups could react to Urban Council and Legislative Council polls in one of two ways.

First, they could decide to contest seats.

If this were to be the case, he believed labour, church, education, student, social work and residents' groups would win 70 per cent or more of the seats.

"The question is whether these groups are really trusted by the citizens at the grassroots. This depends less on our words than our acts."

Alternatively, pressure groups might choose not to fight elections, but instead simply join forces to form a united front.

"Then it will be necessary to talk to us on a basis of equality. It will be necessary to take our opinion into account."

Mr Lau said pressure groups had a positive role to play in discussions on Hongkong's future.

"Frankly, if somebody can reflect the opinion and needs of the people, it is the groups which are really rooted among the people."

And their silence up to now should not be misinterpreted.

"I do not believe that our not expressing an opinion in public at this time means that we have none," he remarked.

But he warned: "If the pressure groups themselves cannot yet inspire the full confidence of citizens, they cannot represent them in anything they say and cannot sufficiently reflect their opinion."

Nevertheless, the time would come when the pressure groups' opinions would have to be heard in Peking and Whitehall.

"I believe that the day will come when they will look to us in earnest."