

'An unholy alliance'

Protestant liberals accuse leaders of bowing to Peking

By Emily Lau in Hongkong

The politics of 1997 is polarising the congregations of Hongkong's mainline Protestant churches along "conservative" and "liberal" lines.

The issue facing church leaders and parishioners alike is whether the church should speak out openly in support of democratic reform in the run-up to 1997, when the British-administered territory is returned to Chinese sovereignty, or maintain a low political profile, thus avoiding a confrontation with Peking which would prefer that Hongkong's colonial-style government remains for the most part intact.

Unlike Christian churches in the Philippines and South Korea, which have played an important role in those countries' struggles for democracy, Protestant churches in Hongkong rarely challenge government policy, choosing instead to remain on the sidelines. But because of its organisational ability, the church has the potential to become a force for political change here, disproportionate to its size.

There are 240,000 Protestants in Hongkong, a little more than 4.2% of the 5.5 million population. The Protestant churches are divided into the mainline churches, which provide many social services, and the smaller evangelical and independent churches, which are more concerned with their own growth.

The smaller churches are not split by the political-reform issue, but some individual members have recently allied themselves with mainline liberals.

The mainline churches are the Sheng Kung Hui, or the Anglican Episcopal Church, the Church of Christ in China, the Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church. Sheng Kung Hui, because of its historical association with the Church of England, occupies an influential position among the Protestants.

The church's conservative leadership includes Anglican Bishop Peter Kwong, Yung Kok-kwong of the Church of Christ in China, John Tse of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hongkong and Ko Siu-wah of the YWCA. All are office bearers in the influential Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC), an umbrella organisation that concerns itself with religious, moral, social and economic issues.

The conservatives seldom espouse their political views in public but can be said to represent those members of their congregations who want to avoid confrontation with Peking. None of the conservatives has spoken in favour of direct elections to the Legislative Council (Hongkong's law-making

body) in 1988, as is currently under government consideration.

Kwong has stated that developments in Hongkong should "converge" with the Basic Law, a mini-constitution for Hongkong which will come into effect when the territory becomes a special administrative region (SAR) of China in mid-1997. Peking first used the term "converge" in reference to the dovetailing of political reform here with the SAR mini-constitution. Yung said he believes in God and thinks Hongkong will always have a bright future.

Leaders of the mainline Protestant churches' liberal faction include pastors and church workers in their 30s and 40s. They comprise about 30 people who have recently formed the Church Workers' Association to discuss political, social and economic issues.

The liberals openly support direct elections for Hongkong and have declared their position on such other issues as the building of a nuclear power station just across the territory's border with China at Daya Bay, which they oppose, and the 1987 Public Order (Amendment) Ordinance, which imposes restrictions on the media, which they also oppose.

Although small in number, the liberal leadership says it represents a segment of the Protestant church which wants to see a democratic and more open system of government established here before 1997. Recently, the liberals have joined forces with activists in the evangelical and independent churches to push for democratic reform.

Like many other people in Hongkong, some Protestant clergy despair over the territory's future after 1997 and have chosen to emigrate. The president of the Methodist Church of Hongkong, Lincoln Leung, predicts that few of today's Protestant church leaders will be around in 1997, because of emigration and retirement.

Church liberals say polarisation among church members began in 1985 after Kwong was appointed by Peking to the Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) and the Basic Law Consultative Committee (BLCC). The BLDC is

a 58-member body set up to write the Basic Law. The BLCC is a 180-member body established to collect and collate public opinion here on what Hongkong's people want for the future.

Kwong's associates in the Basic Law drafting process are said to include Bank of East Asia chief manager David Li, who is also a leading figure in the Sheng Kung Hui, and chief justice-designate Ti-liang Yang, who is a member of St John's Cathedral, the oldest English-language Anglican church in Hongkong. Li is a BLDC vice-chairman, and Yang was a BLCC vice-chairman until recently, when he had to step down after being appointed Hongkong's first Chinese chief justice. Yang was replaced by Ko of the YWCA.

In December 1985, Kwong, Yang, Li and Ko were involved in the controversial "election" of BLCC executive committee office bearers in which the candidates were in fact hand-picked by three BLDC vice-chairmen — Xu Jiatun, di-

rector of the Hongkong branch of China's official Xinhua news-agency, business tycoon Sir Yue-kong Pao and Li. Kwong defended the appointments by saying that an election does not mean names had to be marked on ballots (REVIEW, 19 Dec. '85).

Soon after the incident, more than 60 Christians signed an open letter to the press criticising Kwong and asserting that he did not represent church views.

Because the conservatives are so closely involved in the Basic Law drafting process, the liberals fear that their aspirations for a democratic system of government after 1997 may be stifled

by what is commonly called "an unholy alliance" among the conservative church leaders, business interests and the communists. Political observers say Peking has neutralised the potential power of the church by co-opting its leaders into the decision-making process.

Conflict between conservative and liberal Protestant church members also exists within the HKCC. The HKCC is chaired by Ko, but real power lies in the hands of a triumvirate of HKCC executive committee members comprising Kwong, Tse and Yung. The Methodist Church's Leung, a former HKCC chairman, said the current executive committee does not want to give the impression that the HKCC is a pressure group seeking confrontation with the authorities.

HKCC general secretary Kwok Nai-wang, a liberal who belongs to the Church of Christ in China and supports



Fung: 'invisible' pressures.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Turning a blind eye

Proposed law to approve Pakistan aid sours US-India relations

By Robert Manning in Washington

In one bold stroke, the US Senate adopted a bill on 12 December that has cleared the way for approval of a US\$4.02 billion, six-year aid programme for Pakistan.

The bill, if passed into law by both houses of the US Congress, would in effect cut the link between US aid and restrictions on Islamabad's alleged nuclear-weapons programme. At the same time, the move threatens US-India relations by tying US hi-tech sales to India to the curtailment of New Delhi's nuclear programme.

The proposed legislation would prevent US aid or hi-tech sales to any country which produces weapons-grade enriched uranium (such as Pakistan) or separates plutonium (such as India) and which processes nuclear materials in unsafeguarded facilities. Neither country's nuclear facilities are covered by international safeguards.

The move has angered Indian officials — including Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi — as, for the first time, the bill would put the Indian and Pakistani nuclear programmes on a par and the onus on India to prevent nuclear proliferation in South Asia. Although India exploded a nuclear device in 1974, it has not pursued development of a nuclear capacity, whereas Pakistan appears intent to do so, a US official, commenting on India's reaction, said.

The Senate bill also would provide a six-year waiver of the 1977 Symington Amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act, which requires aid to be cut to any country importing enrichment material for a facility not subject to safeguards.

Washington's previous US\$3.2 billion aid programme for Pakistan, which expired this year, also contained a six-year waiver. But the previous aid package required the US president to provide "reasonable assurances" to the congress that Pakistan was not developing a nuclear capability. Earlier this year, US officials said they could no longer provide such assurances.

Suspicious about Pakistani intent were again raised when Arshad Pervez, a Pakistani national, was arrested in July on charges of trying to export illegally from the US maraging steel and Beryllium to Pakistan. Both are used to make nuclear weapons. Pervez went on trial in Philadelphia on 7 December, and if President Reagan determines that Islamabad is involved, aid could be cut under the 1985 Solarz Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which requires the administration to cut off aid

to any country which illegally exports from the US materials which would contribute to acquiring a nuclear capacity.

The US willingness to turn a blind eye to Pakistani nuclear ambitions is a major victory for the Afghan lobby, which views US covert aid to anti-Soviet rebels in Afghanistan, via Pakistan, as more important than clamps on aid to dissuade Islamabad from going nuclear. Some analysts question whether the US can halt Islamabad's nuclear quest and also argue that as Moscow is inching towards a withdrawal from Afghanistan, now is not the time to jeopardise aid to the mujahideen/Afghan rebels.

The bill introduces two major changes in US policy towards aid to South Asia. First, the president would



Gandhi: cold comfort.

no longer be required to certify that Pakistan is not acquiring nuclear weapons as a condition of aid. Secondly, the bill states that no country in South Asia may receive US aid or buy sophisticated US technology unless the president determines that it is not producing weapons-grade material.

The bill was designed to deflect potential criticism of what US officials concede is a continuing Pakistani effort to acquire nuclear weapons by pointing to India's capacity to produce such weapons. In addition, the bill would allow the president to waive the ban every six months if he certifies that another country in the region is producing weapons-grade uranium or plutonium and that continuing the aid would be in the US national interest.

The Senate bill differs from that

direct elections, has criticised the executive committee for exerting what he believes to be too much control over HKCC staff. He said this has affected staff morale and prevented the HKCC from playing a more active political role during the transition to 1997. Kwok has come under tremendous pressure in the past year, church activists said. Kwok said he has decided to resign.

In October, liberal activists on the HKCC's public-policy committee were replaced, including veterans Dr L. K. Ding and Hans Lutz. The committee helped found a coalition opposing the Daya Bay nuclear-power station and a force pushing for direct elections. The conservatives also tried unsuccessfully to oust from the HKCC the outspoken and socially active Christian Industrial Committee, which speaks out for workers' rights.

Sheng Kung Hui liberal Alan Chan, who is also head of the Chinese University's theology division, used to represent the Anglican Church on the HKCC executive committee but was replaced last year. Five years ago, the Anglican Church stopped sending students to his division, and last year the Church of Christ in China followed suit.

Another Sheng Kung Hui clergyman, Fung Chi-wood, who has been active in the democratic movement and in the campaign against the Daya Bay plant, recently revealed that he has been under pressure to take a two-year "study leave" in Britain. Fung said the church was trying to get him to leave Hongkong temporarily but he had refused to go. He said the church has become nervous about its members' social and political activities and did not want members making critical comments against the Hongkong or Chinese governments.

Kwong argues that the church should not be involved in politics. Instead, he said, it should nurture people to be more mature, thus enabling them to face any political situation. He said dissent is common within the Anglican communion in other places, but in Hongkong church members like "to wash their dirty linen in public."

Ian Lam, a spokesman for the Anglican diocese, said individual church members can speak freely on any topic but the church as an institution does not take a stand on political issues. He denied that the church had tried to suppress dissenters, but insisted that Fung, as a member of the Anglican clergy, must get his bishop's approval before becoming involved in non-church activities.

Fung, Kwok and Leung all spoke of "invisible pressures" within the church. Leung summed up the situation: "This is not yet 1997, but certain Hongkong people are already stipulating what can and cannot be done. In most cases, these are people with foreign passports who will leave when things go wrong." ■