

itself over growing juvenile delinquency. Few have bothered to consider that the population increase in itself is enough to account for much of the crime rise. Solutions have varied from shipping young thugs off to a "devil's island" and castration to Chief Justice Sir Ivo Rigby's proposal to inflict a "short, sharp shock" by sending them to hard labour detention centres or by beating — with more probation officers to help the rehabilitable.

While Hongkong works itself into a lather over the activities of foolish young hoodlums whose only language is the chopper and the iron bar, it conveniently overlooks more sophisticated "sins" which contribute to the crime wave so many beat about. And while the colony's hedonists soothe their cares away in a variety of houses catering to fleshly desires, they would be most put out if it were suggested the owners and patrons of such establishments should be sent to Her Majesty's Prisons.

The thin line between what society accepts as moral or brands as sinful is blurred here by the varying standards of two cultures. A panel of five censors — all aging Chinese in a community where half the people are under 21 — carefully snips out the more explicit bedroom scenes from films and bans altogether such dangerous fodder as America's paean of praise to the hip, pot-smoking world of youth, *Easy Rider*.

Yet any youngster stepping out of a bloody Mandarin swordplay movie is confronted by a choice of vice varied enough to blight any flower-child. Sex can't be seen on screen but the real thing can be bought for a few dollars. Marijuana-smoking is taboo inside the cinema but outside a youngster needs very little initiative to get a steady supply of the world's cheapest heroin.

Gambling is beyond the pale in Hongkong — unless you join the thousands who pack the Happy Valley racecourse at weekends. In public many declaim against the evil and vow that dog-racing and other forms of gambling must never be legalised. In private it is another matter. Illegal casinos do massive business in Yaumati; illegal gambling schools flourish openly near the Macao ferry terminal; illegal bookmakers take bets on anything.

While many would agree that what an adult does with his spare time is his own concern and none of the state's, the open way in which Hongkong feeds on illegal practices while hypocritically condemning them is hardly calculated to persuade youngsters they should keep within the law. When the most

prosperous man on the block is the brothel-keeper, a youth has little incentive to go to work in a plastics factory.

In one direction at least the colony has recognised at government level that too much temptation can make Jack a bad boy. From February 1 it will be an offence for managers of licensed premises to employ anyone under the age of 14 or to employ any girl under 18 between 8pm and 6am.

The restriction will affect some of the colony's best-known restaurants and hotels who have long used under-age labour. Unfortunately, it will put out of work hundreds of youngsters who have nowhere else to go because of the slow development of post-primary education — and whose families depend on their earnings.

While removing many girls from the twilight bar world where the drug habit often begins, the new law offers no solutions to the problems of stress and



Hongkong youngsters: Whose fault if they stray into crime?

temptation that face local youngsters. As long as the rewards are higher from illicit employment and society turns a blind eye to the situation, youngsters will continue to graduate straight from primary school into the drugs and sex rackets.

The conflict between Eastern and Western cultures and between today's urban environment and yesterday's rural ways in China has thrown relations between parents and children into confusion. The stifling claustrophobia of the crowded resettlement estates and tenements adds to the stress and pushes the colony's suicide rate up dramatically — in the January-November period last year 523 people committed suicide, against 330 for the whole of 1969.

Born of an immoral trade itself, Hongkong has been forced to act the whore ever since merely to survive. It can hardly express surprise when it sees its children going to the bad.

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## HONGKONG

### A Bloomin' Shame

BY DAVID BAIRD

*20 Jan 1971*

**Hongkong:** Morals are something the rich can afford to ignore and the poor can't afford at all. This British colony with conflicting values from East and West somehow manages to get the best of both worlds. Like a duchess with the heart of a bawd, it steps delicately around the puddles of vice as though they didn't exist — and then nips back later to wallow in them.

Currently the colony is flagellating