

J. K. M. P.

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## Bridging-the-gap myth – and reality

I HAVE lived in Hongkong for 13 years, through the riots of 1966 and 1967, boom and recession, stock market boom and bust, scandals and triumphs. In all that time, it seems to me, relations between the Government and the governed have never been worse than they are now. And as I regard Hongkong as my home, this worries me . . . and ought to be worrying a lot more people a great deal more than it does.

The root of the trouble seems to be this: In my early days in Hongkong, the Government made no pretence of consulting the people; it just did what it felt right. Now the shadow of consultation is there, but not the substance.

Naturally people feel aggrieved when the Government propaganda machine tells them repeatedly how sensitive it is to the wishes of the people, and the same Government refuses to listen as soon as those same people try to express their wishes.

Unless the Government begins to listen and respond, it is guiding Hongkong towards serious trouble; the warning signs are already there.

Now for some instances, well-known in themselves, and cumulatively a crushing indictment of the Government (and I am deliberately omitting all cases in which I have personally been involved):

- The police revolt against the ICAC, and the subsequent amnesty; however wise an amnesty might eventually have been, to announce it in the face of mutiny was a blatant display of weakness. The whole incident revealed the complete ignorance of the sentiment of the police both in the Government and in the force's own top ranks. This will not be solved (far from it) by importing top brass from overseas.

- The continued arrogance of the Government appointee, Mr A. de O. Sales, towards elected members and anyone else who disagrees with him. The Government should realise that Mr Sales represents nobody but himself . . . and his opinions are of little more value than those of the individual man in the street. A man in his position needs contact with the people; if he does not maintain that contact, he should be replaced.

- The total disregard shown by the Government towards the protests of the Heritage Society over the old KCR Terminus (partly Mr Sales again). The Government must learn that it cannot go on fobbing off the appeals and complaints of intelligent people with half-truths and evasions, nor can it dismiss the views of people so evidently genuinely concerned with the well-being of Hongkong. . . as if they were the lunatic fringe (even if it thinks so).

- Government's persistent disregard of the views of Mrs Elsie Elliott, who was attacking corruption long before the Government admitted it existed, and who, though she has sometimes been wrong in minor points, has generally been right on major issues. Moreover, she is loved and trusted by the people of Hongkong far more than anybody else in the Government or the Urban Council.

- The virtual sacking of Sergeant Khan for embarrassing those in authority – hard on Sergeant Khan, but what a remarkable self-indictment of "those in authority."

- The arrogance and insensitiveness, and above all unwillingness to see the other side's point of view, of Mr Colvin Haye over the Precious Blood School. The facts are still not clear enough for me to be sure of the rights of the matter, but Mr Haye, by his behaviour, has put the Government firmly in the wrong (not for the first time; remember the TV discussion of the education proposals?).

- The total disregard of the rights of villagers in Tsun Wan who would be displaced by the MTR. What take precedence – the wishes of the Government, or the rights of the governed?

Present systems of popular "representation" lend themselves to use by those who wish to look good in the eyes of the Government, and are not really concerned with the welfare of the people. The Uncle Toms of big business and the Bar can never really represent the people (though I freely admit that some of them make a real effort to do so).

There must be a solution, and it is up to the Government to find it. Neighbourhood councils with universal franchise might be one way; elected members in Legco might be another, though unless they have some power, this will not attract the right kind of person. There is no political reason against a much greater internal self-government than we have at present. And the Government cannot turn the clock back.

Anybody could make such a list as the above, or a much longer one; many besides myself are worried at the way things are going. The gap between Government and governed has never been greater, and the "We are right because we are the Government" syndrome, even if it is true, will never narrow that gap.

– MICHAEL WEBSTER.