

# A year of bickering as councils debate status

by  
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IT HAS been a year of much bickering and lobbying for both Urban Councillors and District Board members over their status.

Though much public attention in the past 12 months has been captured by the fervent discussions on the future composition of the Legislative Council, debates on the future role of the two municipal bodies and District Boards are also gathering momentum.

The 100-year-old Urban Council is facing the greatest political dilemma. District Board members have repeatedly suggested that the council should be dissolved as there is an overlapping of work between the boards and the council.

Some have suggested that Urbco should follow the structure of the Regional Council, since a furor stems from the fact that Urbco assigns its members to seats on District Boards as ex-officio members.

Some board members are unhappy that these appointees are not contributing to district affairs but are earning the same allowances as board members, besides their stipends as councillors.

Urbco members take every chance to defend their role and say their existence

is necessary for the well-being of Hongkong.

While many of the councillors warned their colleagues in the 1985 annual conventional debate against Urbco's power being diminished, councillors this year made their views even more clear.

Three councillors, including the chairman, Mr Gerry Forsgate, made defensive speeches this year, saying it was unwise and not feasible to dissolve Urbco.

Delegation of Urbco's responsibilities to the boards, they argue, would create too many fragmented responsibilities in different districts.

On the other hand, councillors have been discussing ways to improve the relationship between District Boards and have been looking at different options of restructuring Urbco, but no agreement has been reached.

In August, Mr Forsgate wrote to Sir David Akers-Jones, then Chief Secretary, recommending that the review of Urbco be postponed until the 1987 political review.

It is understood that the



**URBCO Chairman Gerry Forsgate...took a defensive stance**

Government also does not want to get rid of the council in the near future, since its counterpart, the Regional Council, was established only in April.

This was indicated when the late Governor, Sir Edward Youde, said at a meeting with Urbco members in May that the three-tier system of government should remain unchanged.

Another backing force for Urbco were the compliments paid by the Director of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office, Mr Ji Pengfei, on its work during a visit to China in November.

With its different structure, the New Territories municipal body — the Regional Council — seems to have been spared the criticisms which Urbco received.

But of course, if there are any changes to Urbco, Regco will also be affected, having the same responsibilities in municipal affairs.

Regco members joined the chorus of Urbco members in a meeting with the Omelco's constitutional affairs panel saying that the three-tier system should remain unchanged.

Seven Urbco members also handed in a paper to the Basic Law Consultative Committee urging that the two municipal bodies be retained.

They suggested that in the future it may be more appropriate to merge Regco and Urbco.

On another political front, discussion of the status of District Boards was triggered by dissatisfaction over the size of the Government's increase in board members' allowances.

Only the prompt decision by the Government to allow a higher increase — from \$3,500 to \$6,000 for board members and from \$7,000 to \$12,000 for chairmen — quieted the unhappy mood.

This may have given board members a higher status, but they are continuing their quest for a bigger say in district affairs.

The City and New Territories Affairs Administration has started to consult all 19 District Boards on the review of district administration.