

S.C.M.P.

1 July 1986

PROF PETER HARRIS

1997 — a flaw ₂₄₋₂₅

THE British Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher recently said something which may have inadvertently scuppered the 1984 Sino-British Agreement. During her visit to Israel, Mrs Thatcher visited the West Bank. There she saw an example of one country, two systems. The one country was the sovereign state of Israel; the two systems were Arab and Jewish, with two very contrasting life-styles very apparent.

This article does not seek to draw any conclusions from the Israeli-Arab relationship, but merely to ask whether the British Government has really understood the nature of the Sino-British Agreement signed 21 months ago.

In the course of her visit to the West Bank, Mrs Thatcher forcefully stated that there should not be two levels of rights in one sovereign state. In saying this she put her finger on a flaw in the Agreement which she signed with the Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou Ziyang, in December 1984.

After 1997, people living in the Special Administrative Region, Hongkong, China, will be able to enjoy a number of rights, as indicated in Annex I page 23 of the Agreement. These include freedoms and rights regarding membership of trade unions, the right to strike, to demonstrate, to choose one's occupation, to worship, to travel freely and to raise a family freely. After 1997, these rights will be protected by inter-

national agreement in Hongkong but not in the rest of China.

At present many rights are not guaranteed, protected or even permitted in the PRC. Indeed, *Amnesty International* has complained about the PRC's continuing unwillingness to sustain an internationally acceptable level of rights.

After 1997, Hongkong will in effect enjoy "superior" rights to those exercised inside China proper. However from 1997-2047 we may also presume to see a process of harmonisation in all things, including, one may suppose, in human rights.

Hongkong may come more to resemble China in many ways, for after 2047 the 1984 Agreement will surely lapse. These dates may seem far off, but the logic of post-1997 Hongkong-China relations is in the direction of political integration.

Now Mrs Thatcher has drawn attention to a serious problem. Many people have not done more than parrot the "one country, two systems" slogan. When faced with a practical example (as in the case of the Israeli-occupied West Bank), Mrs Thatcher saw the immense difficulties of trying to marry widely-differing, even contradictory, social, economic and political systems.

Mrs Thatcher's remarks on Israel do throw important light on the contradictions inherent in the one country, two systems slogan. Contradictory plural systems cannot be taken lightly.

It has been demonstrated

time and time again that a sovereign state will normally and generally resist derogations from its authority. The US fought a civil war in the 1860's against the "principle" of one country, two systems. South Africa and Sri Lanka are learning the lesson.

One must regretfully point out that conflicting social systems within one sovereign-state rarely succeed. The cases of the Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, amongst others, may be cited as tragic examples of pluralistic conflict.

As time goes by more political complexities are revealed. Recently a problem has arisen over the question of the meaning of the term "accountability." Now in the British tradition "accountability" means political "responsibility."

Responsibility as a political idea suggests at its simplest that honourable men will take the blame for their mistakes and will resign if necessary. Sir Ivor Jennings said that the major British contribution to the art and science of politics was the invention of the idea of responsibility. In short, responsibility ensures, is the vehicle of, accountability.

Good communists however reject such ideas as "bourgeois." Communists take "democratic centralism" as their version of accountability. Democratic centralism really means that the Communist Party runs the show to the tumultuous applause of the rank-and-file.

Mrs Thatcher was of course correct.