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A.J.C. ²⁶/₅
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FM HONG KONG 251004Z MAY 83
TO IMMEDIATE F C O
TELEGRAM NUMBER 724 OF 25 MAY
INFO IMMEDIATE PEKING

PEKING TELNO 485 : FUTURE OF HONG KONG : CHINESE REPLY

1. I CONSIDER THE AMBASSADOR'S CONCERN MISPLACED. NO-ONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT EXCO SHOULD HAVE "CONTROL" OVER HIS INSTRUCTIONS - THAT RESTS AS ALWAYS WITH MINISTERS. EXCO HAS SHOWN NO TENDENCY TO "TINKER" WITH THE DRAFTING OF TEXTS. NEITHER MEMBERS OF EXCO NOR I WOULD ACCEPT THAT WE HAVE GONE BEYOND LORD BELSTEAD'S ASSURANCE (AN ASSURANCE INCIDENTALLY WHICH WE COULD NOT CONSTITUTIONALLY HAVE DECLINED TO GIVE).

2. THE DANGER WOULD ARISE NOT FROM MINISTERS PREFERRING THE ADVICE OF OTHERS TO THAT OF EXCO, IF A DIFFERENCE AROSE (PARA 4 OF PEKING TUR). THEY WOULD HAVE GOOD REASONS FOR DOING SO WHICH COULD BE EXPLAINED. THE REAL DANGER WOULD LIE IN THE SERIOUS AND POLITICALLY HIGHLY DAMAGING CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE WHICH WOULD OCCUR BETWEEN LONDON AND HONG KONG IF IT BECAME CLEAR (AS IT WOULD) THAT THE ADVICE OF EXCO WAS NOT BEING TAKEN (NEXT WORD UNDERLINED) BEFORE THINGS WERE SAID TO THE CHINESE. IT WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS A LACK OF TRUST, AND A DEROGATION FROM THE MINISTERIAL ASSURANCE. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE WHERE ANY DOCUMENT IS TO BE LEFT WITH THE CHINESE (AS THE SPEAKING NOTE WAS ON THIS OCCASION). WHERE THE EXACT WORDING OF A TEXT IS IMPORTANT, (I.E. BECAUSE A POINT OF SUBSTANCE IS INVOLVED) THERE WOULD BE A RISK OF CONFUSION OR WORSE IF IT HAD TO BE PARAPHRASED OR SUMMARISED FOR EXCO.

3. I FIND PARA 3 OF PEKING'S TUR OVER-SIMPLIFIED. PRECISE WORDING IS IMPORTANT ONLY WHERE ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE LIE BEHIND THAT WORDING SEMI-COLON AND THE CHINESE CERTAINLY SAW THE PM'S LETTER AS MORE THAN AN "ADJUSTMENT OF LANGUAGE".

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4. IF I MIGHT MAKE A GENERAL POINT: THE GOVERNOR-IN-COUNCIL IS THE GOVERNMENT OF HONG KONG. THE COUNCIL IS COMPRISED OF OFFICIALS AND UNOFFICIALS WHO HAVE WIDE EXPERIENCE AND WHO HAVE ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GOOD GOVERNMENT AND WELFARE OF THIS TERRITORY. WE SHOULD BE WELL ADVISED TO TREAT THEM AS SUCH AND, AS I BELIEVE MINISTERS DO, TO VALUE THEIR ADVICE AND NOT TO SEEK TO IMPOSE LIMITATIONS ON WHAT ADVICE SHOULD BE SOUGHT FROM THEM. THEY ARE INTER ALIA THE ONLY DIRECT SOURCE OF (NEXT WORD UNDERLINED) CHINESE ADVICE WE HAVE. THEY ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE TEAM AS ANYONE ELSE: AND HAVE A GREAT DEAL DIRECTLY AT STAKE IN THIS NEGOTIATION.

5. WE HAVE REACHED A POINT WHERE THERE IS FULL CONFIDENCE IN EXCO THAT THEY KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON AND THEIR ADVICE IS BEING TAKEN (EVEN IF NOT ALWAYS ACCEPTED), AS LORD BELSTEAD ASSURED THEM IT WOULD BE. TO SEEK NOW TO EXCLUDE THINGS WHICH ARE GOING TO BE PUT TO THE CHINESE FROM THE MATTERS PUT BEFORE THEM, WOULD BE A RETROGRESSIVE AND POLITICALLY DANGEROUS STEP.

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FUTURE OF HONG KONG

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