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HONG KONG: DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

1. IN MY TELNO 1674 I SAID THAT THE INTERNAL STRENGTH OF THE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE WOULD BE A KEY ELEMENT IN THE GUARANTEES FOR HONG KONG AFTER 1997 AND THAT IT WOULD BE OUR AIM TO DEVELOP THE EXISTING INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE THEM SELF-SUSTAINING AND, BY BUILDING IN CHECKS AND BALANCES, TO MINIMIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHINESE INTERFERENCE. WE HAVE GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT HERE TO HOW THIS COULD BEST BE DONE. OUR STARTING POINT HAS BEEN THE BELIEF THAT STABILITY WILL BE BEST SERVED BY BUILDING ON EXISTING INSTITUTIONS.
2. IN CONSIDERING HOW OUR EXISTING INSTITUTIONS COULD BEST BE DEVELOPED, WE HAVE VERY MUCH IN MIND THAT QUITE APART FROM THE PEKING TALKS THERE ARE GROWING SIGNS OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE RUNNING OF HONG KONG. THIS HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED BY PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION. SO THERE IS A DEMAND FOR FURTHER EVOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURE WHICH IT WOULD BE WISE TO SATISFY.
3. BEGINNING AT DISTRICT LEVEL WE HAVE SET IN HAND A REVIEW OF THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM. THE DISTRICT BOARDS ARE PARTLY ELECTED AND PARTLY APPOINTED AND THEIR ROLE IS ADVISORY. OUR REVIEW WILL CONSIDER WHETHER THEY SHOULD BECOME, BY STAGES, ENTIRELY ELECTED AND IN WHAT AREAS THEY MIGHT BE GIVEN LOCAL EXECUTIVE POWERS.
4. AT THE NEXT LEVEL THE URBAN COUNCIL IS HALF ELECTED AND HALF APPOINTED. ITS AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY IS CONFINED TO THE URBAN AREA. OUR AIM WILL BE TO FIND A WAY OF EXTENDING THE ELECTIVE SYSTEM AT THIS LEVEL TO THE REST OF THE TERRITORY THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SECOND REGIONAL COUNCIL WITH AT LEAST HALF THE MEMBERS ELECTED BY DIRECT FRANCHISE. WE WOULD AIM TO BRING THIS INTO EFFECT EITHER AT THE TIME OF THE NEXT URBAN COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN 1986, OR BEFORE THEN IF PRACTICABLE.
5. THERE WOULD THEN BE A CONSTITUENCY BASED ELECTIVE SYSTEM BOTH AT DISTRICT BOARD AND REGIONAL COUNCIL (URBAN COUNCIL) LEVEL THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY.
6. NORMALLY IN A BRITISH DEPENDENT TERRITORY THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO CREATE A DIRECTLY ELECTED LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL. IN HONG KONG BECAUSE OF THE CHINESE ATTITUDE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN CONSIDERED TOO RISKY TO HAVE A DIRECTLY ELECTED COUNCIL. THERE IS A DANGER THAT ELECTIONS AT THIS LEVEL COULD LEAD TO COMPETITION BETWEEN COMMUNIST, NATIONALIST AND OTHER FACTIONS TO A GREATER DEGREE THAN HAS OCCURRED AT LOWER LEVELS.

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7. I AM THEREFORE THINKING IN TERMS, ONCE ELECTIONS ARE ESTABLISHED THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY AT REGIONAL LEVEL, OF GENERATING THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IN PART THROUGH ELECTIONS BASED ON QUOTE COLLEGES UNQUOTE OF DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS AND REGIONAL COUNCIL MEMBERS, AND IN PART FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF IDENTIFIED FUNCTIONAL GROUPS, SUCH AS INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATIONS, THE UNIVERSITIES, THE MEDICAL PROFESSION, LABOUR BOARDS ETC. THIS WOULD DIFFUSE POLITICAL POWER WIDELY IN THE COMMUNITY AND MAKE THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LESS OPEN TO MANIPULATION BY ANY ONE GROUP, WHETHER CONSTITUENCY-BASED, PARTY-BASED OR BASED ON ECONOMIC POWER. THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO PROVIDE FOR A MEANS OF CREATING AN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OTHER THAN BY A SIMPLE APPOINTMENT. WORKING ON THE PRINCIPLE OF TAKING THE PATTERN OF EXISTING INSTITUTIONS AS OUR STARTING POINT WE COULD ENVISAGE THE COUNCIL CONSISTING OF 3 OR 4 EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS FROM THE SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE, AS NOW: RESERVED SEATS FOR A REPRESENTATIVE OF ONE OF THE NOTE-ISSUING BANKS AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF OVERSEAS COMPANIES ESTABLISHED HERE: AND 7 OR 8 MEMBERS ELECTED BY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL FROM AMONG THEIR OWN NUMBER.

8. WE HAVE CONSIDERED WHETHER A QUOTE MEMBERSHIP UNQUOTE I.E. MINISTERIAL SYSTEM COULD BE INTRODUCED SO THAT UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL COULD BECOME RESPONSIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT PORTFOLIOS. I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT, IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HONG KONG, THIS WOULD LIMIT THE MEMBERSHIP OF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO THOSE WEALTHY ENOUGH TO BECOME FULL TIME POLITICAL FIGURES. BUT MORE IMPORTANT, SUCH AN INNOVATION WOULD INTRODUCE AN UNCERTAIN NEW ELEMENT TO THE POLITICAL SCENE HERE AT A TIME WHEN THERE WILL BE ENOUGH UNCERTAINTIES ANYWAY. MY CONCLUSION IS THAT, AT LEAST AT THE FIRST STAGE, THE SYSTEM SHOULD REMAIN AS IT IS NOW WITH DEPARTMENTS BEING SUPERVISED BY SECRETARIES IN THE GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT (THE LOCAL EQUIVALENT OF PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARIES) WHO SUBMIT PROPOSALS TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL FOR ENDORSEMENT, AMENDMENT, OR REJECTION.

9. THERE WOULD REMAIN THE ISSUE OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE FUTURE GOVERNOR/CHIEF EXECUTIVE SHOULD BE SELECTED AND APPOINTED, WHICH I WILL MAKE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE TELEGRAM.

10. I DO NOT SUGGEST THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO COME TO CONCLUSIONS NOW ON THE DETAILS OF THE PATTERN I HAVE SET OUT ABOVE: AND THERE MAY NEED TO BE AMMENDMENT IN THE LIGHT OF PUBLIC RESPONSES AT EACH STAGE: BUT IF WE ARE TO PRESENT A PAPER WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS TO THE CHINESE ON ARRANGEMENTS (NEXT TWO WORDS UNDERLINED) AFTER 1997 WE SHOULD HAVE A REASONABLY CLEAR IDEA IN OUR MINDS AS TO WHAT STRUCTURE WE WOULD HOPE TO SEE IN PLACE SOMETIME (NEXT WORD UNDERLINED) BEFORE THAT DATE. BOTH THE CONCEPT ITSELF AND THE DETAILS OF A CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS OF THIS COLONY BETWEEN NOW AND 1997 WOULD NEED TO BE ENDORSED BOTH BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND BY MINISTERS BEFORE THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH INSTITUTIONS COULD BE TAKEN AS OUR STARTING POINT FOR THE PERIOD AFTER 1997.

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11. IN DEVISING THIS PLAN WE HAVE HAD VERY MUCH IN MIND THE NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT NOT ONLY CHINESE SUSCEPTIBILITIES, BUT ALSO THE NEED TO PRODUCE INSTITUTIONS WHICH WOULD BE COMPATIBLE WITH WHATEVER ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TERRITORY ARE MADE FOR A PERIOD AFTER 1997. THE ARRANGEMENTS SET OUT ABOVE ARE DESIGNED TO PRODUCE INSTITUTIONS MORE DEMONSTRABLY REPRESENTATIVE THAN THOSE NOW IN EXISTENCE HERE, BUT WHOSE PATTERN AND APPEARANCE WOULD BE FAMILIAR TO THE POPULATION. THE PATTERN IS ALSO DESIGNED TO BALANCE THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT AGAINST A REQUIREMENT NOT TO CONCENTRATE POWER ON ANY SMALL GROUP IN THE SYSTEM, THUS MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR IT TO BE MANIPULATED BY ANY SMALL GROUP INTERNALLY, OR VULNERABLE TO PRESSURE EXTERNALLY.

12. I PROPOSE TO BEGIN DRAFTING AN OUTLINE PAPER FOR THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ON THE LINES OF THE ABOVE. BUT BEFORE DOING SO WOULD BE GRATEFUL TO KNOW WHETHER THIS GENERAL CONCEPT IS IN LINE WITH THE THINKING OF MINISTERS IN THE FCO.

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FUTURE OF HONG KONG

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