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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

5 December 1983

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Para Murks:

To note

PA 6/12

Dear John,

Hong Kong: Mr Robert Adley MP

Mr Adley visited Hong Kong last week. As you know, he takes a close interest in the subject both in his capacity as Chairman of the UK/China Parliamentary Group and personally. He has tended to be critical of the Hong Kong Government and of the Unofficials there in taking an unrealistic view of the negotiations with China.

Mr Adley called on Sir Geoffrey Howe on 30 November. He particularly asked that his remarks should be passed to the Prime Minister. I enclose a copy of the record of the discussion. As you see, his main theme was the need for more democracy in Hong Kong and the unrepresentative nature of UMELCO views on the future.

As you know, Mr Adley is very much in the public eye in Hong Kong because of his outspoken views. His visit attracted intense press interest which he appears to have interpreted partly as resulting from the hostility of the Hong Kong Government. We would not accept his criticism of the Governor as being out of touch with opinion beyond UMELCO. Sir E Youde has indeed reported on this very point. But we think that to a great extent Mr Adley has misinterpreted UMELCO's anxiety about Chinese assurances on the future as an unrealistic desire to stick to sovereignty at all costs.

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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MEETING BETWEEN SECRETARY OF STATE AND MR ROBERT ADLEY MP,
30 NOVEMBER 1983

Present

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Mr R D Clift

Mr Robert Adley MP

Attitude of Hong Kong Government to Mr Adley

1. Mr Adley said that he was concerned about the attitude of a number of people in the Hong Kong Government. He had never been received anywhere, let alone in a British colony, in so hostile a way. On the earlier attempt to "blacken his character" he had shown Mr Luce the letter which he had received from Miss Jill Hartley, a former lobby correspondent. The Secretary of State said that he had raised the matter with the Governor who had investigated it carefully. But he understood that the letter from Miss Hartley had not identified her informant. That made it very difficult to pursue the question.
2. Mr Adley said that there had been other examples of the hostile attitude of the Hong Kong Government. The Ming Pao, a reputable newspaper, had told him that they had been asked by the Government Information Services for information about Mr Adley. Moreover the Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers had told him that he had received enquiries about him. In his discussions with Hong Kong officials he had been particularly concerned at the attitude adopted by Mr Denis Bray, the Secretary for Home Affairs.
3. Some of the Hong Kong Government's attitude was reflected in the way in which local press had handled the visit. The South China Morning Post had been particularly hostile. He had been amazed at the attention which his visit had aroused. He had been followed everywhere by television cameras and asked a succession of completely naive questions.

Attitude of UMELCO

4. Mr Adley said that he was convinced that UMELCO did not

represent the body of Hong Kong opinion. He himself had been able to have meetings with a wide variety of people and was convinced that no one of any significance believed that sovereignty was an issue. He spoke warmly of Mr Brian Tisdall and Mr John Walden. UMELCO on the other hand appeared to believe that sovereignty should not be conceded and should be kept as a card to be played at the right time. This was quite misconceived. In his view sovereignty was a poisoned chalice, which should be got rid of as soon as possible.

5. Mr Adley said that he had great respect for the Governor as a negotiator but believed that he was out of touch and too much influenced by UMELCO opinion. In the circumstances there was a danger of a sensible agreement with China being frustrated.

Views on An Agreement with China

6. In Mr Adley's view we had no power and no cards to play in the negotiations. He had had frequent meetings both with the Chinese Embassy here and with the NCNA in Hong Kong. He understood China's position. China wanted a peaceful and quiet transition. They did not want to be put into the position of having to provide substitutes for British administration in 1997. They were prepared to respect Hong Kong's genuine autonomy. That was why talk of maintaining the "status quo" was so misleading. For some it meant the preservation of Hong Kong's freedoms, way of life plus the continuing link with Britain. But the people of Hong Kong did not want that link. They did want their freedoms to continue and China would be prepared to meet them on that point.

Democracy for Hong Kong

7. Mr Adley said that there was a strong demand for genuine democracy in Hong Kong; (a group of Hong Kong Students had written to the Prime Minister about it and had received a routine reply). Moreover the Chinese now not only did not oppose democratisation but positively wanted it. Their aim was to see representative government established so that an elected local administration could be in place well before 1997, thus minimising the effect of any change at that date.

8. Mr Adley said that the problem was that UMELCO were dead against democracy. They were appointed and would oppose any measures to bring it in.

9. The Secretary of State reminded Mr Adley of the reasons why normal representative government had not been established in Hong Kong, because of the Chinese attitude. He also thought that there were serious doubts in Hong Kong as to whether the Chinese concept of democracy was the same as theirs. How far did democracy really work in Shanghai for instance? He mentioned the work that had already been done in Hong Kong at the local Government level, for instance through the District Boards. Mr Adley acknowledged that there had been reasons why Hong Kong had not developed democracy up to now but believed that the position had changed and that the Chinese would welcome genuine elections. He dismissed the District Boards as having no power to do anything other than debate.

10. Mr Adley said that the Chinese had clearly indicated to him that if a democratic system were to produce representatives of British or other expatriate origin who fulfilled the normal seven year residents' qualification they would be prepared to accept such people in a position of responsibility in Hong Kong. This would be a useful way of encouraging confidence in Hong Kong.

Senzhen Special Economic Zone

11. Mr Adley described his visit to the zone at which he had been warmly received. He had been struck by the way in which the Hong Kong press had free access to the zone and by the border which was being constructed between the north of the zone and the rest of Guangdong province. He had had a strong hint from the NCNA that they could foresee a time at which Hong Kong would expand northwards into the zone.

Hong Kong's Concerns

12. The Secretary of State asked if it was not the case that people in Hong Kong were genuinely anxious. Mr Adley said yes, they were petrified. The Secretary of State asked what ideas Mr Adley had to provide reassurance. Mr Adley said that his recipe was early recognition of China's sovereignty and more democratisation which

CONFIDENTIAL

might well produce British expatriates in positions of authority. The Secretary of State asked if he had any other ideas. Mr Adley said that more use might be made of the trade unions. He thought that one of the problems was that people in Hong Kong had ideas but were afraid to voice them. He had been told of people who had lost their jobs because they had been critical of the Government.

13. The Secretary of State thanked Mr Adley. It was not surprising that so much attention had been paid to him during his visit. He saw the problem of confidence in Hong Kong as arising from the fact the people had genuine doubts about the Chinese assurances. He undertook to inform the Prime Minister of Mr Adley's views.

30 November 1983

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