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RY TELNO 236: FUTURE OF HONG KONG: PUBLIC PRESENTATION.

1. I DISCUSSED THE PAPER IN YOUR TELNO 74 TO PEKING WITH EXCO THIS MORNING. MEMBERS EXPRESSED GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT WITH IT. THEY FELT THAT IT SHOWED INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN HONG KONG, PARTICULARLY IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT SPATE OF APPARENTLY AUTHORITATIVE ARTICLES IN THE UK PRESS. A MORE ROBUST AND EXPLICIT PRESENTATION OF THE BRITISH POSITION WAS REQUIRED, THAN WAS ENVISAGED IN THE PAPER, TO COUNTER THE IMPRESSION OF 'SELL OUT' BEING SPREAD BY THE UK PRESS.

2. THE UNOFFICIALS WERE MUCH CONCERNED WITH THE RAPIDLY DIMINISHING CREDIBILITY OF LEGCO MEMBERS WHERE THE FUTURE IS CONCERNED. AS SIR S.Y. CHUNG PUT IT, HONG KONG PEOPLE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY LEGISLATIVE COUNSELLORS WHO WERE APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THEM REMAINED SILENT ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE OF THE TIME WHEN BRITISH MPS EXPRESSED THEIR VIEWS FREELY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS WAS THAT:

(A) THE LEGCO MEMBERS WHO WERE NOT ALSO MEMBERS OF EXCO SHOULD NOW BE FREE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE VIEWS OF THE PEOPLE OF HONG KONG.

(B) GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONTINUE TO GIVE THEM SUCH BRIEFING ABOUT THE TALKS AS WAS THOUGHT POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE, BUT SHOULD NOT SEEK TO RESTRICT THEIR FREEDOM TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS.

(C) TO ENSURE AS FAR AS POSSIBLE THAT THEY DID NOT AROUSE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO GIVE THEM SOME GUIDANCE ON OUR REVISED OBJECTIVES. BUT WHAT THEY SAID SHOULD BE LEFT TO THEM.

(D) IT MIGHT BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE IF THERE WAS A SUDDEN FLURRY OF SPEECHES AND STATEMENTS BY LEGCO MEMBERS. THERE WOULD THEREFORE BE A NEED FOR CAREFUL ORCHESTRATION.

(E) THE ABOVE POINTS APPLIED TO SPEECHES ETC MADE OUTSIDE THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ITSELF. SOME MEMBERS THOUGHT THAT LEGCO MEMBERS SHOULD ALSO BE FREE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AND ASK

MEMBERS SHOULD ALSO BE FREE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AND ASK QUESTIONS IN THE LEGCO CHAMBER AS MPS DID; BUT IT WAS AGREED THAT THIS WOULD REQUIRE SEPARATE CONSIDERATION.

3. THERE WERE TWO MAIN SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE THEMES WHICH SHOULD BE PUT ACROSS:

(I) SIR S.Y. CHUNG SAID THAT IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR THAT CONTINUING BRITISH ADMINISTRATION COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED AND THAT HMG WERE SEEKING THE BEST POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD BE DETERRED FROM EXPLAINING THE POSITION HONESTLY BY ANY THOUGHT OF THE 'RESENTMENT' WHICH DOING SO MIGHT AROUSE (PARA 2 OF THE PAPER).

(II) WITH SUPPORT FROM OTHERS, MISS DUNN SAID THAT LEGCO MEMBERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DISCUSS THE CHINESE PLAN CRITICALLY, AND SUGGEST AREAS WHERE IT MIGHT BE MADE MORE SPECIFIC.

4. I UNDERTOOK TO REPORT MEMBERS' COMMENTS, AND THEIR CLEARLY EXPRESSED VIEW THAT A FRESH PAPER SHOULD BE PREPARED.

5. COMMENT. WHILE I APPRECIATE THAT THE PAPER IN YOUR TELNO 74 TO PEKING HAS BEEN SEEN BY MINISTERS, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT IT IS NO LONGER SUFFICIENT TO MEET THE SITUATION HERE. I WILL TELEGRAPH FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS ON WHAT I SHOULD SAY TO LEGCO UNOFFICIALS. (GIVEN THEIR HIGH DEGREE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT POSITION I HAVE AGREED TO MEET THEM ON FEBRUARY 10). I SHOULD ALSO BE GLAD TO KNOW WHETHER YOU WISH TO PREPARE A REVISED VERSION OF THE PAPER IN LONDON, TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE COMMENTS IN MY TELNO 236 AS WELL AS THOSE IN THIS TELEGRAM. ALTERNATIVELY WE COULD DO SO HERE.

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