

**HOW BAD IS THE SITUATION IN
THE HONGKONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ?**

The Government of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) does not appear to appreciate, being criticised.

And officialdom of the Government of the HKSAR, also, does not appreciate, being criticised.

But, when a government sees thousands of people, taking to the streets, protesting about acts of government, or, conversely, non-acts by government, then, something must be terribly wrong ... with that government.

And, then, criticism of government, its paid employees and non-paid advisers is very positive -- because it can tell a government administration of the frustrations of the populace.

On Sunday, June 25, 2000, thousands of students, doctors and other professionals, as well as trouble-makers, out to stir up the mobs, in addition to Right-of-Abode seekers, went on marches throughout the HKSAR, all protesting about one thing or another.

In total, at least 5 different segments of society hit the streets of the HKSAR, shouting, complaining and protesting.

This is the first time in many a decade that such a thing has taken place in the HKSAR.

The protests were all symptomatic of a deep-seated problem, which is facing the Administration of Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa.

It is immaterial, at this stage of the proceedings, to try to ascertain who is right and who is wrong; the only thing that matters, now, as far as the Tung Chee Hwa Government is concerned, is to determine what action is to be taken to alleviate the fears and frustrations of the people of the HKSAR.

One must assume that the people, marching down streets of the HKSAR on that Sunday, are representative of a much bigger segment(s) of society, a segment(s) which, also, feels that it has problems that need to be addressed by the Administration.

And, if the problems are not addressed by the Tung Chee Hwa Administration, in the fullness of time, that segment(s) will voice its dissent, too.

One hopes that that segment will voice its dissent in a civilised manner, but there is no guarantee of that, as history has indicated.

Just one week later, on the fourth Anniversary of the assumption of sovereignty of Hongkong by the Government of the PRC, July 1, more than 40 diverse group of HKSAR residents hit the streets.

Exactly, how many people turned out to protest against the Government was unknown, but it was in excess of 10,000 residents, in any event.

Which is a sizeable group of discontents, no matter how the Administration cuts it.

The discontent at the Administration was gathering steam -- and more and more people were becoming more and more brazen at demonstrating to the Administration as to how they felt about the way that it was, allegedly, (mis) handling HKSAR affairs.

Flag burning and desecration of the HKSAR flag, in spite of it, being a criminal offense, was par for the course.

Civil disobedience is rampant.

The Administration cannot doubt this fact.

Yet, the Administration appears to be doing little to nothing about the very clear and present danger that it is facing.

The Administration's political myopia may astound political scientists and, probably, universities in the West will be using the events of the past month as a teaching aid in order to demonstrate to students what happened and the reason that it happened.

When a situation arises whereby it appears to the youth of a territory that there is no future, or an unclear future, at best, then that is, potentially, an explosive situation.

Such a situation has not yet reached that level of crisis in the HKSAR, and, hopefully, it never will.

At the same time, however, there are danger signs, going up in many areas of the HKSAR; the Administration should heed those signs.

The signs are clear: Things are not going as well as they should in the 416 square miles that comprise the HKSAR.

The protests and vocal complaints of Sunday, June 25, and July 1 on the streets of the HKSAR, were not just coming from the uneducated segment of society, the labourers, and Right-of-Abode seekers, etc, because the most highly educated segment of the HKSAR society, also, showed displeasure at their lot.

People have a tendency to rebel about a situation when, to them, it appears that their lot is hopeless; and, that they are left in a helpless situation.

This situation is similar to tenant-residents of a multi-storey, apartment building, who, finding that things do not work, or do not work well, that doors in the corridors do not fit properly, that the lifts are, continuously, breaking down, that the common areas are not kept clean, etc, rebel and determine to destroy those parts of the apartment building that offend the residents.

It is a form of passive protest to the owners/builders/architects of the apartment building, but the passive protest has all the appearances of graduating to becoming very active in the fullness of time unless some remedial steps are taken.

This is the reason that one finds instant slums, popping up in areas where the high-density accommodation is relatively new.

A lack of architectural sensitivity to the needs of those who will be living in an apartment building may help to lead to the making of an instant slum.

Similarly, the lack of Administrative sensitivity as to the needs of the population of a territory, over which it has administrative control, may help to lead to discontent and a loss of confidence in those who head the government.

This feeling of abject rejection by the population of a territory filters down to employees of the government, in due course.

This is what is taking place in the HKSAR, today.

Even the political party, supposed to support the Administration of the HKSAR, the Liberal Party, has found itself in trouble with some of its members, who are not afraid to chant, loudly, and publicly: '*Down with Tung* (Chee Hwa)!'

The major complaint of some of the members of the Liberal Party, it seems, is that many of the members' assets have been depreciated to the extent, in many cases, of 50 percent and more.

The Liberal Party was not expecting to have its members, and those who joined the '*Save our Assets*' protest, complain to the extent that they did on Sunday, June 25, and this may well indicate that the leadership of the Liberal Party is not in touch, completely, with reality, notwithstanding the feelings of many of its members.

The Liberal Party, faced with the situation, which, clearly, was spontaneous and unrehearsed, reacted to the seemingly unwanted and unexpected protests in a way that is not altogether uncommon, with Vice Chairperson of the Liberal Party, Ms Selina Chow Liang Shuk Yee, reported to have stated that the Liberal Party did not endorse the views of those who were protesting against the Government.

In short, she and her political party wanted to distant themselves from the people that they were claiming to represent.

One must have some sympathy for Ms Selina Chow, however, since it must have been very difficult for her to understand what was happening, and how best to comment ... while standing on her feet, being more used to being seated than standing.

Like so many political parties in the HKSAR and like the Administration of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, in general, the Liberal Party and most of its members are reactive.

However, they would be well advised to be proactive from hereon in.

About one month ago, it was suggested, by certain HKSAR business interests, that the HKSAR Government should cease selling its flats to the poorer sector of society -- Home-Ownership Scheme, etc -- and rent out the 16,000 units that are available, at this time.

It was assumed that unloading 16,000, HKSAR Government-built flats onto the property market at this time would hurt the interests of property moguls and companies that specialise in construction and real-estate ventures.

The Government responded, within 24 hours, agreeing not to sell the 16,000 flats, but being very sure to point out that it was not acceding to the demands of big business.

The other side of the coin is that, for people to own their own homes, it makes them feel part of a territory.

So the Government of Mr Tung Chee Hwa acceded to the demands of the minority (big business) at the expense of the majority (the poorer segment of society and the so-called '*sandwich class*').

Every family wants to have a home of its own, free of the burdens of a mortgage, hanging over the family's head.

If a government administration can accede to the aspirations of its people, then it will be deemed to be a successful government.

What could be more fulfilling for the less fortunate members of the HKSAR society than to be able to own their own homes -- and to boast of the fact.

They do not want charity. They want to be able to state that they have earned the right to own their roof over their heads.

The Tung Chee Hwa Administration, by acceding to the demands of big business, has forsaken its duty of fidelity to all the people of the HKSAR and, especially, the poorer sector, the bread-and-butter community which is unlikely, ever, to be able to afford to purchase private-sector accommodation.

The Intelligentsia Rise Up

But the situation, with regard to social unrest in the HKSAR, extends much further than just to property issues.

The '*cream*' of the intellectual crop is, also, complaining.

The '*cream*' is not complaining about depreciating assets or their members, being unable to purchase a roof over their heads, although they, too, must be hurting.

They are complaining about something much more important: What they see as Government abject incompetence.

It was reported that more than 1,000 medical practitioners took to the streets, also, on June 25. They were complaining about the way in which the HKSAR Government had determined to restructure some segments of their profession.

These doctors maintain that such a move will waste resources and undermine the morale of the medical profession, which, in turn, will impinge on the quality of service to patients.

The 1,000-man, strong protest lasted only about one hour, it was reported, with the doctors, standing in front of the Hospital Authority: Passive resistance.

These doctors were not asking for anything, but trying to send a message to the Administration in a way that was guaranteed to make the Administration listen.

As war is the natural (or unnatural) extension of diplomacy, so a protest of this nature must be considered an extension of frustration at a government administration, which, seemingly, is not sensitive to the requirements of a certain segment of society.

It means, in short, that Government is perceived as not listening, not understanding, and is viewed as being apathetic to the requirements of the society that it is sworn to serve.

One is reminded of the 1918 demise of Nicholas II of Russia, the last Emperor of that country.

In 1905, Saint Petersburg was paralysed by strikes, following a straining of the Russian economy due to the high cost of maintaining the Russo-Japanese war of 1904.

When Russian workers and their families tried to present their protests to the Tzar, his soldiers fired on them, killing many.

The result was more strikes and protests throughout Russia until Tzar Nicholas II had to concede and to agree to form a constitutional monarchy.

Tzar Nicholas II established a '*Duma*', an elected assembly of sorts, but he reduced its effectiveness by personal manipulation.

Tzar Nicholas II abdicated the throne after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and, thereafter, he and his family, hated at this time by the majority of the Russian people, were executed in a most brutal manner.

The French Revolution of 1789, extending through to 1799, is yet another example of social problems which, if left unchecked, results in violent protests from the populace.

In the case of the French Revolution, King Louis XVI came to power in 1774 and there followed one economic crisis after another.

War and royal mismanagement of the country and increasing national debt led to the poorer sector of French society, suffering horribly.

Attempts at social reforms were thwarted by the clergy and the French nobility until, on July 14, 1789, the people of Paris openly revolted, leading to the establishment of the First Republic and the installment of the very popular Napoleon I, formerly known as Napoleon Bonaparte, as its head.

In both of the above-mentioned cases, the rulers of their countries -- Tzar Nicholas II of Russian and King Louis XVI of France -- did not heed the clarion call of the people.

And all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put the countries back together again.

Regardless of what the PRC Government may think about imperialistic Britain, in the old Hongkong, the British Administration worked, and worked well to the benefit of all of the people who lived under the protection of the British.

The Post Office functioned efficiently, the streets were cleaned, daily, the Government- subvented hospitals and medical facilities worked and performed their assigned tasks, the education system, for all its failures, was among the best in Asia, the District Officer System kept in touch with people at all levels, as did the Urban Council ... and the economy prospered due the laissez-faire economic philosophy, laid down by the British Imperialist dogs (in the words of the PRC Government, during the Cultural Revolution of 1965).

Something in the territory, now known as the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, has changed, to be sure.

But does the Government of Mr Tung Chee Hwa recognise the changes in the HKSAR and feel that it has a duty to tackle the problems of today?

Or is the HKSAR Administration awaiting orders from Beijing?

If Mr Tung Chee Hwa will not be accountable to the people, whose lives he controls, who will be responsible?

In the words of William Shakespeare:

*'... Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.'*

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