



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

How fickle is the electorate in the democratic system of government! In the United States of America, say what you might about the President, Mr George W. Bush, but you cannot doubt that he is an honest and God-fearing man, who is trying his best to do the right thing for his country and his people ... as he sees it. However, it is very clear that he cannot satisfy, or ameliorate the outward display of disappointment and/or disenchantment, of the electorate, no matter what he does, now. The war in Iraq, as it drags on, with more and more American servicemen, being killed, so the popularity of President George W. Bush plumbs to new lows. When, initially, he waged war on al-Qaeda, the majority of the population of the US was behind him. He was definitive and determined in his quest to rid the world of Osama bin Laden and his followers in the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation – and the US electorate backed him. The sting of al-Qaeda's attack on New York's World Trade Center was still smarting as Americans counted their dead and wounded; the US people were demanding action from their elected Government; they got that which they demanded. And, today, they are complaining about that same action! Unlike the elected Government of The Philippines, with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroya, having been accused and found guilty of vote-rigging in the last election, sparking widespread calls for her impeachment, there is no such suggestion of impropriety in respect of President George W. Bush. Further, unlike his predecessor, President Bill Clinton, there appears to be no suggestion of infidelity in his personal life. It could be said that, morally, he is living an exemplary life as President and as a private individual. He may have been a bankrupt and something of a sot, prior to entering the White House, but, today, he is living the life of a paragon of virtue. Yet, his popularity fades with each passing day. If one compares President George W. Bush's Government with that of the Administration of the last Chief Executive of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China, Mr Tung Chee Hwa, one notes the very dramatic contrast. To begin with, you understand, of course, that Mr Tung Chee Hwa was foisted upon the population of the HKSAR; this territory has never known or tasted Western-styled democracy and, in the past, when the British ran Hongkong as a British Crown Colony, nobody seemed to mind just as long as one could enjoy basic freedoms and there were lots and lots of money to be made. Today, however, it is a very different ball-game, as the Americans would say. So, let us look at American democracy and compare it with Chinese-styled dictatorship, as has been practised in the HKSAR from July 1, 1997, until today:

- 1. President George W. Bush shoots straight from the very minute that he has a good bead at his target, whereas, in the case of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, he could never find a target at which to shoot and, in any event, he never knew how to shoot, and, even if he had known how to shoot, he, always, maintained, by his very actions, or the lack of them, that he needed permission from Beijing to shoot, long before he even thought of squeezing any gun's trigger;*
- 2. President George W. Bush surrounds himself with competent and very able advisors, most of whom are dedicated to doing the best that they can for the US and its population, whereas, in the case of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, he determined that the best way to administer the Government of the HKSAR was to surround himself with sycophants, many of whom were incompetent bumpkins or, alternatively, people who stood to gain, politically or financially, from being a friend of the Chief Executive, one way or another; and, as such, never offered impartial and objective advice, and, even if they had offered impartial and objective advice, it would have been unlikely that Mr Tung Chee Hwa would have listened*

– because that was never an integral part of his mandate to listen to opinions of HKSAR people – even when he was awake;

3. *President George W. Bush, once he has made a determination, will stick by his plan as best as he can even though that plan may become unpopular in time, whereas, in the case of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, firstly, he never had one, well-thought-out plan, during his entire term in office, and, secondly, even when there appeared to be a nut of a plan of some merit, presented to him, he would buckle under if that plan might have been perceived to be contrary to the interests of certain plutocrats of the territory or Beijing, his friends, sycophantish and/or obsequious advisors;*
4. *President George W. Bush, regardless of his falling from grace in the eyes of a large part of the electorate, of late, is still well regarded as being a man who has the welfare of the United States of America and its population foremost in his mind whereas, in the case of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, it was, always, the interests of Beijing, which came first, while the seven million human population of the HKSAR came in somewhere down the line – if he were able to remember that there was that group of people, who liked to engage in walkabouts at least once a year; and,*
5. *President George W. Bush is accountable to the US Congress and, it follows, to the people of the country, and there are checks and balances in the American system of Government, which have been placed there to control his actions, whereas, in the case of the former Chief Executive of the HKSAR, the Legislative Council – which, one might suggest, is supposed to be the legislative counterpart of the US Congress – is little more than a rubber stamp for the Administration and any suggestion of a rebellious outburst from one or more of its members was usually met with the trite statement of the order of ‘shallow’ from Mr Tung Chee Hwa and, in any event, Mr Tung Chee Hwa would do that which he wanted, regardless of the opinions of cantankerous members of the Legislative Council since he had unfettered powers, as has the present Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen.*

While the Western-styled democratic system of government may not be the best system of government, it is, nevertheless, the best system that has evolved, thus far. But, as with everything, there are compromises with which one has to live. It must be accepted that, when formulating any plan to rule a territory and to be equitable to all classes of its human population, compromises are, sadly, necessary. The good thing about the US system of democracy – because it does vary from other forms of Western democracy, say that which is practised in the United Kingdom, as an example – is that those who are empowered to represent the population by universal suffrage and to sit in the Senate and the Congress are, more often than not, competent people who have the respect of the majority of the electorate which put them in power. In the HKSAR, however, there is, sitting in the Legislative Council, today, one felon, one, long-haired, bad-mannered lout, at least one pair of admitted fornicators, and a rather large gaggle of Legislative geese from which known noises will be forthcoming when told, or it is intimated, to utter the necessary responses to known and predictable acts.

So, which system of government is better in your opinion: That of the democratic US with all of its obvious flaws; or, that of the dictatorial, albeit, often paternalistic, HKSAR?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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