



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Have you ever wondered down which road Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is taking us? Is it a form of Neo-Socialism? Is it the road that guarantees his term as Chief Executive of Hongkong for a second term? Or is there some sinister purpose behind his actions? I really have grave concerns about a number of his new proposals of late. (A new government proposal, in my book of definitions, is a proposal that will be passed into law without any real consultation period, sooner or later). During the unfortunate and disastrous term of the First Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee Hwa, one saw, unfortunately, the passing into law of The Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme, which has turned out to be nothing less than a 'tax' on both workers and their employers. It has, however, become a boon to those Hongkong financial institutions which try, unsuccessfully, to manage the billions of Hongkong dollars that flood into the coffers of these institutions, with two percent and more of that money, going into the pockets of those same institutions as fees and what-have-you. The entire Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme is badly flawed, but it is unlikely that the law could ever be repealed – sadly. That law, like so many others, has an entrance but no egress: Once the law is entered in the statute books, it is like a tight tunnel where, once entered, there is no room to turn round in order to return to the entrance. Pity employees of Hongkong, who have to contribute five percent of their hard-earned money into a plan, which will, at the end of the day, be of little use to them! Today, Hongkong has just been told that there shall be two more tiers of political appointees, all of whom must share the views of the Chief Executive if they want the jobs. The twenty two or so political appointees will cost Hongkong taxpayers about sixty two million dollars, annually. By definition, since they must share the views of Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, they will be sycophants of the First Order although they will only carry the nomenclature of deputies and assistants of the Second Order. Their salaries will be whopping, close to two hundred thousand dollars, annually, on average. The announcement of the new political tier comes only a fortnight after the Financial Secretary proposed the imposition of a five-percent Goods and Services Tax, a GST tax as it is called in Canada. This GST is supposed to bring in about thirty billion dollars, annually, and is aimed, the official jargon claims, at broadening the tax base at a time that Hongkong can well afford it. The cost to police a GST has never, yet, been stated, but one must assume that it will be another burden on taxpayers. Prior to the latest two legislative proposals, there was the innuendo, sounding loud and clear, that Hongkong is to have a five-day working week. And, prior to that, there was the strong 'suggestion' that air-conditioning in the territory should be turned up to twenty five degrees Celsius in order to conserve energy. Then, there is the plan to have a minimum wage for workers and to introduce a medical and health scheme for workers, with employers, paying for the privilege. The five-day working week, the minimum wage law and the medical and health scheme for workers are all guaranteed to find support at the grass roots level: Who in government service would not want to work less for the same amount of money? It is akin to receiving a pay increase, is it not? Which worker of menial tasks in private enterprise in Hongkong would not like to be able to be guaranteed a certain minimum amount of money per hour and, at the same time, be assured of having his employer pay for some, or all, of his medical and health costs? Every new tax that is passed into law has its pros and cons, but the government of Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is looking at installing a tax road, using a lantern globe that is black, reflecting insufficient light upon one's way over the jagged bounders, strewn on that road:

*'If somebody wanders down my road,
Following my unsteady track,*

***And loses and or stumbles along his way,
It is because his lantern globe is black.'***

Which brings me back to my original suggestion: Is the Chief Executive pushing Hongkong down the road to a type of Neo-Socialism? The idea of socialism has been tested and found wanting in the extreme. Hongkong is a capitalistic society and anything that smells of socialism should be considered abhorrent. Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen may have a pleasant-sounding name for his new policies, such as Christian Socialism, but it is still socialism. The accepted definition of Christian Socialism, which has its roots in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, is the idea that socialism is a direct development and outcome of Christianity and, to be effective, it must be based on Christian principles. It was, originally, aimed at the down-trodden workers of England and it supported them at a time that those workers badly needed support. Christian Socialism enjoined the rich to practise justice and charity in the spirit of Christian fellowship. Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is a devout Catholic: His motives, as far as I am concerned, are suspect.

For myself, I am far from being neophobic, but I pride myself on being a member of the loyal opposition to my government, if I may call this government, 'my government'? I wonder as to the reason that the Chief Executive does not want to have members of the loyal opposition as his advisers? Does he not want a sounding board to be close at hand, one where his ideas may be examined, objectively? What is the value in having sycophants sit at one's table because one knows that that which such people utter will be ingratiating statements, aimed at pleasing the man who put the food on the table and invited them to partake of it? The Catholic Church, of course, tolerates no comment or opposition to its encyclicals.

Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen has never been in business, being a British Civil Servant nearly all of his life. He may have done a reasonable job as a servant of the British colonial rulers of Hongkong, but one must question his ability as a leader of a society that embraces plutocracy, in the main. Ask Mr Li Ka Shing, one of the wealthiest people in Hongkong and, perhaps, the wealthiest man in the world, as to whether or not he would prefer to live in a society where the concept of Christian Socialism is practised to that of crude and rude capitalism. I would bet my best new knickers that Mr Li Ka Shing would choose the latter to the former. Government interference, directly or indirectly, is, and must always be, unwelcome. Yet, nobody has complained, stentoriously, about our Chief Executive!

I, really, fear that Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen may be re-elected for a second term to the highest position in Hongkong. Can anybody in Hongkong stop it before it is too late?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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