

The Betty Letters

Mr Dear Grandchild,

It was such a giggle to read about last Thursday week's Press Briefing of Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen when he announced, officially, that he had thrown his hat into the political arena in order to become the Chief Executive of Hongkong for another term of 5 years. As if there were, ever, any question about the matter. He is reported to have stated, among other things: 'The Government bears a responsibility to relieve people's burden. Once elected, I pledge to lower taxes to reduce the tax burden on the middle class ...'. All this time, I had always thought that it was the bailiwick of the Financial Secretary of Hongkong to make recommendations with regard to the tax rate for the territory. Now, it would appear that the Chief Executive is the lone arbiter to make determinations about taxes. Further, may I infer from the statements of the Chief Executive of last Thursday-week that it was he, and he, alone, who made the determination to scrap the Goods and Services Tax, proposed, in the middle of last year by the Financial Secretary? If I am correct in my extrapolation, could I go a little further to suggest that there is no interdependent relationship between various Hongkong Government employees of the Secretarial Grade and that of the Chief Executive and that, in fact, the Hongkong Government employs the hub-and-spoke form of management, with Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, being the hub, with all of the Secretarial Grade civil servants, reporting directly to him for direction and final determination – the spokes of the wheel? The entire show, put on by Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, last Thursday-week, was a real eye-opener for me because, while I had, always, imagined the workings of the Hongkong Government, I had no idea just how very much it was a dictatorship. The charade of the Chief Executive 'elections' was something that I would have expected from somebody of the ilk of Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) to write. Lest you have forgotten, Mr Dear Grandchild, Lewis Carroll, the pseudonym of Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, English author, mathematician, and logician, is best known for his creation of the immortal fantasy, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.' Actually, this is one of my most-beloved stories and I have read it more than once. A major difference between Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen – aside from the enormous intellect of the former, compared with the lack of intellect of the latter – is the absence of didacticism in the words of the latter, compared with the depth of understanding of the former. In Alice in Wonderland, Alice was the first child character in children's literature to see through the didactic pretentiousness and hypocrisy of the adult world. The appeal of the stories to adults is based upon the ingenious mixture of fantasy and realism, gentle satire, absurdity, and logic. The names and sayings of the characters, such as the March Hare, the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, and the White Knight, have become part of everyday speech. While Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson wrote and penned this story, simply to entertain children, whom he, truly adored because of their purity of thought, among other things, as a member of the faculty of mathematics at Oxford University, England, he is credited as being the author of several mathematical treatises, including Euclid and His Modern Rivals (1879). Sadly, Hongkong does not have anybody of the calibre of Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, running for the office of Chief Executive. Come to think of it, I wonder what comments Alice would have made about the mock elections in Hongkong if Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson had known about them. Would Dr Charles Lutwidge Dodgson have likened it to mock-turtle soup?

According to Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, nobody is better qualified than he to be the next Chief Executive of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. I wonder from where he obtained that idea? Most of his life, this man has been a Hongkong Government civil servant, always carrying the flag of the government of the territory, but never being more than a flag-bearer. There is nothing wrong with that role in society because Hongkong needs all kinds of people, from university dons,

to businessmen, to street sweepers, to doctors, etc. The only qualifications that I note for Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is that he has had many years, following the orders of his superiors, most of whom have been British appointees. In other words, carrying out orders of his superiors, like a good little lackey. This was made very apparent when he unveiled his slogan: . The English translation of this slogan, according to Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, is 'I'll get the job done'. The correct translation is: 'I can do the job, well.' His very words have condemned him. He is stating, obliquely, that he is willing to work, but only on the orders of somebody else. Put another way: To continue to be a civil servant. If I am wrong, then, for what reason did he not state: 'I shall work, only, for the benefit of Hongkong people.' The reason that he could not state this is that his allegiance is not to the people of Hongkong, but to the Government of the People's Republic of China. And Beijing pulls his chain, to be sure. Actually, I fully understand his political stance because, in order to try to appease the people of these 416 square miles, he has to persuade Beijing that it is in the interests of the People's Republic of China to grant to the people of Hongkong some of those things that they are demanding. If Beijing were to be persuaded that Universal Suffrage is advantageous in Hongkong, the powers-that-be in the seat of power of the Middle Kingdom have to consider whether or not there would be a cascading effect: Would the Chinese population of Macau demand the same consideration as Chinese population of Hongkong? What about other Special Administrative Regions of the country? And, at some time in the future, would there be a demand in China for the scrapping of the present form of very successful government in favour of something else? What the Chief Executive of Hongkong does, or fails to do, could well have repercussions in other parts of China. For that reason alone, whoever Beijing chooses as the next Chief Executive – and, for certain, it shall be Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen, the way that things stand, today – he will have to follow Beijing's orders. There is nothing wrong with this, also, because, thus far, Hongkong has prospered, thanks to the generosity of Beijing. One hopes that this situation will continue for many years to come. Lastly, Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen has stated that he wants to be a politician, now, but he is acting more and more as though he is a salesman. This is due, of course, to his roots because his first real job was that of a salesman, in fact, prior to accepting a post in the Hongkong Government as a civil servant, many, many moons ago.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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