

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I have been reading about the latest Beijing proposals with regard to Hongkong, obtaining Universal Suffrage in the next decade or so. (For the life of me, I cannot keep abreast of the many suggested modifications to the proposals, subject to Beijing's consent, of course, especially those suggested changes, presented by high-ranking, Hongkong Government civil servants, who do not have any executive power, at this time, but who are praying for the power, uttering daily incantations in the Popular Press.) According to Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, the present proposals are not dissimilar to the 2005 ones. He claims that Beijing proposes various compromises with regard to Universal Suffrage for the territory, but many Hongkong democrats oppose Beijing's compromises, for one reason or another. His idea is that, since Hongkong cannot move the Beijing 'mountain', then the pro-democracy camp in the Legislative Council should seek to chip away at the base of the 'mountain' – even if it means, using a teaspoon to try to accomplish the task. The Frog, who knows all of the bigwigs in Beijing, claims that many of the Legislative Councillors of Hongkong are acting like unreasonable kids, not understanding the way in which the wheels of a government turn. One can catch more bees with honey than with vinegar, The Frog likes to say. I think that he is correct. After all, since July 1, 1997, when the British Colony of Hongkong reverted back to the Government of the People's Republic of China, what substantive gains have been made with regard to Universal Suffrage? The simple answer is: Nilch. The walkabouts in Hongkong are taken for granted, now. Few people are very concerned about 100 or so Filipinas, marching up to the resident of Donald The Duck, demanding a minimum wage that is higher than the going wage for a junior, white-collar worker. And who is concerned about a yelling, screaming, long-haired lout, complaining that he can't have his own radio station in order to broadcast his diatribes? In a free society, as is Hongkong, one is permitted to say anything he or she wants to say, provided that that which is uttered is not slanderous of another. But, when one advocates civil disobedience with the object of instilling people with gross discontent, leading to riot and affray, that is when the line is drawn. I think I may be in the minority, but I maintain that Hongkong is, probably, not ready for Universal Suffrage, at this time, if the current actions of certain members of the democratic camp are a true indication of the extent of the maturity of the electorate. The pro-democracy camp makes the claim that all of Hongkong wants Universal Suffrage as well as a guarantee of freedom of speech, of freedom of choice, of peaceful assembly, of the right to worship in the Church of one's choice, to walk where-ever one wants to walk in Hongkong without fear, and to travel freely where-ever one wants to go. But all of the above, Hongkong people, already, are guaranteed under The Basic Law, the mini-constitution of these 416 square miles. I have never heard of anybody, being denied the basic freedoms that have, always, been enjoyed in Hongkong, even at the time that Great Britain shot off the noon-day gun.

Even with Universal Suffrage, there is no guarantee that the situation in Hongkong will improve. What Universal Suffrage is guaranteed to accomplish is to make Hongkong people more vociferous and more easy to be manipulated by the many unscrupulous people of the territory, especially the monied moguls. How much more vociferous do people want to be? Of course, the democrats among us will state that they would not have to suffer people such as Donald The Duck – who appears to act more like a frightened little schoolboy than a leader of men – or the ageing, whining Virginia The Pip – who changes political positions

almost as quickly as she changes her knickers – or that long-haired, uncouth person whose political agenda is quite likely to be questionable, at times. Universal Suffrage will result in the electorate, being able to elect a Chief Executive, but who is there, among the 7 million people of the territory, who has the qualifications for the job: Mr Lee Shau Kee (), Mr Li Ka Shing (), Mr Richard Li Tzar Kai (), Mr Walter Kwok Ping Sheung (), Mr Thomas Lau Luen Hung (), Mr Cheng Yu Tung (), or, perhaps, the ailing Mr Stanley Ho Hung Sun()? Democracy is a wonderful concept, I grant you that, but it, like all treatises, has its limits in its ability to produce the goods for all. It is, like any motor car, it is a compromise between what one perceives in one's mind and what the automotive science of the day can produce.

Life is, always, a compromise of one sort or another. Even in choosing one's mate, it is a bit of a gamble, you know. Look at me: I am married to The Frog, but I make the best of it. The Frog may not be the Adonis of Hongkong, but he is mine and I am able to manipulate him, almost at will when needs be such. The Frog has attributes that I admire. He, also, has habits that I detest. What can one do about such a situation? I make the best of it; and, I am happy in the knowledge that, after all, the situation could be much worse – I could have married a religious nut! From The Frog's point of view, I suppose that he sees me as being a bit of a tyrant. However, he, obviously, enjoys this female tyrant who makes certain that he is fed properly, that his shoes are shined, daily, that his clothes are always clean, and that, when he falls ill, this tyrant is, always, there to nurse him back to health. It is, simply put, tit for tat (no pun intended). Politics is very similar to any marriage: Tit for tat; a compromise of what one would like to achieve with one's mate; and, what is possible at any particular time and in any particular place with one's choice of a soul mate.

In constitutional politics, a fundamental system of law, written or unwritten, established or accepted as a guide for governing, fixes the limits and defines the relations of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers of the state, thus setting up the basis for government. It also provides guarantees of certain rights to the people. Many authoritarian and totalitarian states have elaborate constitutions, but these, in practice, cannot be enforced on the ruling group, who can always act outside them or suspend or cancel them. China has a very democratic constitution, but the actions of the one-party state can, always, be superseded when needs be such. Universal Suffrage for Hongkong is only possible if the one-party state, that is China, permits it. This is not a State secret, but a fact of life that is unlikely to change while I am still able to cook for The Frog.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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