

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I went to visit the political demonstrations, outside the Legislative Council Chambers, last Wednesday and Thursday, and was very impressed with everything that I witnessed. After eating a healthy lunch at a hotel, opposite the demonstrations, last Wednesday afternoon, I decided to get amid the throng of all kinds of people, the rich, the poor, the disenfranchised, and those who would be lawmakers in years to come. My idea was, simply put, to try to learn a little of the people who took the time and trouble to indicate to the Government of Hongkong and to its Chief Executive how they perceived this and that. For myself, I am completely impartial and objective about the proposals, having been discussed in the Legislative Council Chamber, last Wednesday and Thursday, and, in truth, I really do not care about the character or substance of the contentious matters, still being debated. What impressed me, greatly, was that, here I was, witnessing the democratic right of some of the population of a territory of China – China, being a Communist State – to voice an opinion, one which is, clearly, not considered correct and proper by the majority of the members of the governing Administration of Hongkong. There was, also, to be fair, quite a number of people, attending the demonstrations, who supported the Hongkong Government's political position. You know, in many European countries, especially those where many of the surnames of the population often end with an 'ski' or a 'ka' or sound like 'sputin', the population is not very vocal – because it is not good for one's health to speak out against the government of the day. Even in Asia, there are some countries which, when the government locates a perceived discontented citizen among the intelligentsia, that person may suddenly disappear from public view or, alternatively that person is placed under house arrest – for years. In Hongkong, I have never heard of any aggressive or hostile malcontent, being treated poorly, other than with scorn by certain or all members of the Government or by certain members of a uniformed branch of the Government, whose job it is to make certain that all of the residents obey the law. Unless criminal libel is perpetrated or is perceived about to be perpetrated – inciting activities among a group of the population by the publication of malicious defamation of a person or persons, the durable intent of which is the creation of riot and affray – anybody in these 416 square miles is permitted to voice an opinion on any subject, provided that that which is uttered is not contrary to the law of the day. This is not to suggest that I condone Legislative Councillors, throwing bananas in the direction of the Chief Executive, because that is, clearly, illegal, being contrary to the law since it is an attempted assault and battery. However, one always has to remember that in any apple barrel, there must be at least one apple that is a little bad. Notwithstanding banana-throwing or yelling and screaming by some long-haired lout or louts in the Legislative Council Chamber, all of which is counter-productive and is suggestive that such persons should not be permitted to grace the Chamber, it is sufficient for me that it is not against the law for a member of this august Chamber to be afforded absolute privilege. In Singapore, the bones of many former politicians lie in pauper's graves for daring to utter, openly, that which the ruling party of the day determined is libelous of a member of the government or any individual of that government. Absolute privilege in Singapore really does not exist other than the words, locked in a dusty legal dictionary.

No, My Dear Grandchild, trust me if I say that we are lucky to be living under a governmental regime that is sufficiently erudite, knowledgeable, mature and wise to realise that no territory may be ruled for long by

fear and/or intimidation in the same way that no territory and its peoples can be conquered by force of arms, actual or intimidated.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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