

NOT 'GUESS-MEN' BUT 'YES-MEN', IF YOU PLEASE

When Sir John Bremridge was a mere Legislative Councillor, having not yet risen to the rank of Financial Secretary, he was often heard to remark that he represented the 'Loyal Opposition'.

What Sir John meant by this often-repeated, little ditty of his was that, while he may not agree with everything that the Hongkong Government of his day did, or proposed to do in those days, prior to the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), taking back Hongkong and re-making it into its image, known as the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), he still was British and, as such, loyal to the Crown, and the Hongkong Governor, who represented the British Crown in Hongkong.

When he moved to the Executive Council (EXCO), and then was elevated to the Purple of the Office of the Financial Secretary, he, still, colourfully, threw round the 'Loyal Opposition' quip, and added the term, 'Cotton-Pick'n', to boot.

The whole idea of the Executive Council, according to Sir John, was to be an advisory body to the Governor.

It was never meant to be a sycophantic committee of Chinese and European Hongkongers whose members grew especially long noses in order to obtain some special advantage in the future.

But, if one understands Executive Council Member Chung Shui Ming, correctly, that is the proper composition of EXCO, today: A group of Hongkongers, all having especially long noses.

EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming is quoted as having said: '... EXCO is not a forum for different parties to debate. Its members should agree with the Chief Executive on the basic principles of ruling Hongkong.'

In June, EXCO Member Chung Sze Yuen retired, following many years of serving the HKSAR in a number of different positions, from serving on trade advisory bodies, to the Legislative Council, to EXCO.

On Sir S.Y. Chung's retirement, EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming agreed that 'it is not bad to have new blood ...' in EXCO, but the new blood should be told to toe the Government's line.

Further, EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming is against the idea of having a 'balanced' EXCO composition, he told his listeners on Radio Television Hongkong, earlier this year.

An interesting concept, one may remark, that EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming holds with regard to the composition and duties of EXCO, but it could be held, in the event that EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming is deemed to be correct, that there is hardly a reason for EXCO to exist, henceforth.

Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa can just as well make a determination, unilaterally, and then pass his determinations, down the HKSAR Government's line for execution, without having to talk to his Cabinet, the members of which, according to EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming, are serving, only to support the Chief Executive and his decisions (or those decisions which are echoed from Beijing and then uttered through Beijing's mouthpiece in the HKSAR).

What is the use, one may reasonably ask, of having a top advisory body where all the members refuse to exercise the right of free thought for fear that such an exercise might be interpreted as being a thought which is on a tangent, or in opposition, to the HKSAR and/or the Beijing Government's line of the day?

Following along this line of reasoning, is one to assume that any EXCO member, who does not toe the Government's line, will be sacked from this august body?

What a loss of face that would be!

In fact, EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming's idea is not too far different from that of the National People's Congress where the first dissenting voice is the last dissenting voice to be heard from the brave deputy who, in a moment of rashness or stupidity, decided to spit into the eye of a Communist hurricane.

It has been said that the God that gave us free thought, also, gave us the right to exercise it.

It is, probably, with the kindest intentions in the world that EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming has made a fool of himself, by uttering such twaddle, publicly, but one cannot help but wonder whether or not other EXCO members support the notion that Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa's Cabinet should include only 'Yes-men'.

Herman Melville (1819 –1891), the famous US author – Moby-Dick, Billy Budd et al -- once wrote:

'He says NO! in thunder; but the Devil, himself, cannot make him say YES.

'For all men who say YES, lie; and all men who say NO, -- why, they are in the happy condition of judicious, unencumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet bag.'

There are those people, of course, who claim that real charm, that of Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa, inclusive, is when one is able to persuade somebody to say YES – without having asked a clear question.

With an introduction of the likes of EXCO Member Chung Shui Ming, as to the workings of his little 'club', anybody who is desirous of joining with other EXCO members must know what are the ground rules.

Definitely, free thought, expressed in EXCO, is banned since it would not be in keeping with the philosophy of this little body of men, all of whom are dedicated to the precept that an advisory body to a government means agreeing with that government, regardless of whether or not that government is correct in its determinations.

The British used to have a very popular idiom, which was drummed into soldiers of the Commonwealth: 'Right or Wrong, King and Country.'

Same song, but the words are a little different in the HKSAR of today.

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