

### A FREE PRESS WITHOUT A GOVERNMENT

With the installation of Mr Tung Chee Hwa, as the people's choice, to head the Government of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), there have been important and noticeable changes, the most noteworthy of which is the treatment that the HKSAR's '*Free Press*' gives to political events, those of the PRC and those of the HKSAR (one, often, does not know the difference).

The only reason that the HKSAR Press acts in the way that it does act, today, as opposed to the vigorous stands of the not-too-distant past when The STAR Newspaper of Hongkong (now defunct) would run 144-point banner headlines along the lines: '***NOW WOULD YOU HANG THE COMMUNIST MURDERERS?***' is due to the fact that those at the beneficial head of certain publishing companies fear that, should they embarrass the powers that be (Mr Tung Chee Hwa, et al), it would, eventually, lead to the publishers and/or the publishing companies own financial downfall.

And many, if not most, publishing houses, operating in HKSAR, today, are in business to further the causes of areas of commerce, which are not involved with publishing, but more with certain ancillary services, those offshoots which know how to play the correct HKSAR tune.

These ancillary services are, often, more profitable than allowing one's hands to become saturated with printers' inks'.

On October 6, 1997, Mr Liu Di Zhong made a public announcement with regard to the editorial policy of the new Hongkong Edition of the China Daily (newspaper) of which he is the Editor.

He is reported to have said that the China Daily '*will not advocate anything in conflict with Chinese (PRC) politics or policies.*'

The China Daily is the only national broadsheet, approved by the Central Government, to publish an HKSAR edition.

Based on the Beijing model, it includes economic, social, cultural and political news from the Mainland (the PRC) and the HKSAR.

Mr Liu is quoted as saying: '*We don't advocate anything that will conflict with the policies of China (the PRC).*

*I think every Chinese will be against "two China" policies, or separation of Tibet from the Mainland.'*

Mr Liu, then, went on his own crusade, saying that some HKSAR newspapers were neither accurate nor objective in their coverage of the PRC, but he declined to name the selective media, being singled out.

The Government of the Republic of Singapore and its first elected leader, former 1959 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, led the way by suing the pants off anybody who, directly or indirectly, went against the Singapore Government, or any senior member of it.

It made no difference to the Singaporean Government as to who was to be pilloried, on a certain day. Nationality was never an issue so that, an American university professor was just as good, in the Singapore libel Courts, as was an ignorant or illiterate Singaporean worker.

If somebody were to be brave enough to utter a statement about a member of the Singapore Government, then it was sure bet that that person would find himself in the stocks in the fullness of time if that statement were considered sufficiently detrimental to the Singapore Government and/or its employee.

Interestingly, Singapore Government Ministers have a 100-percent record of success in the Singapore High Court with regard to libel suits – which must mean that they are always correct, at least, at law, if nothing else.

Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa is a close friend and admirer of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Senior Minister who, though he holds no official office, still cracks the whip over his ‘*appointees*’ whether or not he had a hand in their direct appointment to various posts, and whether or not one may call these acts nepotistic.

Woe betide the political foe who makes a verbal or written suggestion, one which could be considered anti-Singapore Government policy, or disparaging of a Minister in the Government of the Republic of Singapore.

Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa, by hook or by crook, may be said to have taken a leaf out of the book of tricks of his friends in Singapore.

But Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa is far cleverer than many of the sycophants in the employ of the Government of the Republic of Singapore because he has never been definitive about anything of any note; and, he has never broadcast his determination in respect of the mandate that the HKSAR Press should obey.

The HKSAR Press – with the exception of the China Daily, of course -- has no definitive idea as to what may be published about this and that, and, especially, about the HKSAR Government, or the PRC Government, or any of the Ministers.

In fact, Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa will state, categorically, that he advocates a Free Press.

The lack of a clear and definitive mandate, as to what may be published, is like the Sword of Damocles, hanging over the concept of a Free Press in the HKSAR.

Which publisher in the world could suffer, having to fight multiple lawsuits for the sake of saying, proudly: *‘I am only publishing the truth – and I can prove it, too?’*

The problem with libel actions is that the cost of proving that that which was published was either true or fair comment, as far as any publisher/editor is concerned, is a high price for enjoying editorial freedom.

And, at the end of the day, even if a publisher, editor, columnist could prove his written allegations, he would recover from the Plaintiff, at most, 50 cents on the dollar, all things being equal.

As is well known, if there are 2 ways to accomplish something, one way, being easy, and one way, being difficult, the artful publisher will look first at the rewards – often to the detriment of the sworn mandate, a mandate which should be considered sacrosanct to his readers and subscribers.

Copy in a newspaper is often referred to, by the unenlightened, as *‘filler’*, placed to embellish lucrative advertisements – and advertisements bring in the bacon, as everybody appreciates.

Without sufficient advertising revenue, no newspaper can survive for long.

As such, the death knell may be ringing in on a Free Press for the HKSAR, with the Press bell, being rung by the sexton, representing monetary greed and political power.

The longer that the HKSAR Free Press is muzzled, directly or indirectly, the louder will sound the death knell until, eventually, all the members of the National People’s Congress and all the members of the People’s Liberation Army will not be able to put the HKSAR back together, again.

The HKSAR is the sum total of the vibrancy of the industriousness and motivation of its working population.

Intellectuals will, eventually, turn their backs on the Beijing *‘puppets’* when they are certain that their efforts are fruitless.

The alternative is to prostitute oneself – and one has seen countless examples of intellectual whores in the HKSAR since 1989 and the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Thousands of the ‘cream’ of the HKSAR have, already, left the HKSAR for fear of retribution from the Beijing masters should the intellectuals incur the wrath of the HKSAR Government, or another member thereof.

Some of the richest HKSAR moguls stay, waiting to be fed the bones of the new Order – while still holding on to Canadian, US and/or Australian passports, lest things go badly down the political road and a ‘fire escape’ is needed in a hurry.

About 25 years after the birth of the United States, its third President, Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809), already a statesman of great merit, had penned his now famous letter to Continental Congressman Edward Carrington.

It was penned in 1789, 11 years before President Jefferson donned the purple of official office. It was entitled, **‘The People Are The Only Sensors’**.

The letter stated, in unequivocal terms, that ...

*‘... I am persuaded myself that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves. The people are the only censors of their governors: and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of institutions. To punish these errors too severely would be suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty. The way to prevent irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs through the channel of the people papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them....’.*

In the same year, Thomas Jefferson wrote to the man who was to become the fourth President of the United States, succeeding him. He wrote to James Madison, saying inter alia, ...

*‘A consciousness of those in power that they produce too great a degree of indignation and those characters wherein fear predominates over hope may apprehend too much from these instances of irregularity. They may conclude too hastily that nature has formed man unsusceptible of any other government but that of force, a conclusion not founded in truth, nor experience. Societies exist under three forms sufficiently distinguishable. 1. Without government, as among our Indians. 2. Under governments wherein the will of every one has a just influence, as is the case in England in a slight degree, and in our states, in a great one. 3. Under governments of force, as is the case in all other monarchies and in existence under these last, they must be seen. It is a government of wolves over sheep. It is a problem, not clear in my mind, that the first condition is the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population. The second state has a great deal of good in it. The mass of mankind under that enjoys a precious degree of liberty and happiness. It has its evils too: the principle of which is the turbulence to which it is subject. But weigh this against the oppressions of monarch, and it becomes nothing, Malo periculosam libertatem quam quietam servitutem. Even this evil is productive of good. It prevents the degeneracy of government, and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs. I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical ...’.*

The pen has proved itself to be mightier than the sword.

Indeed, forever – newspapers without Government.

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