CHAPTER 9

The Growing Rift in the Community

After Patten had put forward his damaging political package Szeto Wah spoke in the Legislative Council on 11 November:
"There are people exerting pressure to dissuade some political groups from supporting the Patten package, and warn that if they fail to do so their members will not be able to ride the through train..." I have no idea who these mysterious people were who were trying to dissuade members because no one approached me on the matter. It was not necessary to do so because the Basic Law was quite clear, that if the 1995 electoral system did not coincide with the model set out in the Basic Law, there would then be no through train for anyone to ride, and Szeto Wah knew this as well as anyone else. In fact, the only pressures I felt from this time onwards came from the Martin Lee camp to which Szeto Wah belonged. Szeto went on to say,"If these reports are true, then the through train will not be a through train. It will be a red wagon for pigs. Sitting on it will not be human beings but pigs - red pigs who will say yes to anything."

So his colleagues, unless they agreed with Szeto, were all pigs, and I was one of them, though I was acting according to conscience. Nor did I give it a thought whether or not I would be on the through train because I was thinking only about a peaceful transition for Hong Kong in 1997. This was not the only time Szeto referred to his colleagues as pigs. On another occasion he said that the Liberal Party had the mentality of pig vendors. His descent to that kind of language, his disrespect for persons of differing views were an indication of what kind of Government Hong Kong would have if ever his party were to gain power. No one would be permitted to have his own views: dictatorship in fact.

I noticed that from the time Patten announced his package, the Martin Lee camp kept baiting the Governor to put the whole Bill before the Council, a fact that makes me fairly convinced that the plan had been connived with them in London in the first place. They were doing their best to hinder further talks between China and Britain because they did not want an agreement which might lead to dropping some of the more blatant breaches of the Basic Law, such as the composition of the Election Committee and the change in the concept of functional constituencies. These were the areas in which they had gerrymandered a system to increase their own chances of grabbing more seats in elections.

I also noticed that Patten was copying their tactics in attempting to hinder any chances of finding a negotiated settlement of the differences between China and Britain. Each time our hopes of agreement were raised, Patten would say something insulting to the Chinese negotiators to dampen the friendly atmosphere which in the pre-Patten days had always existed. Nor was I the only one to notice this. Lam Kui Chun pointed out in one of his speeches: "Patten has repeatedly done or said something calculated to provoke the Chinese whenever the Sino-British talks seemed to be making headway.... What I regret is his timing of such provocative actions or statements which repeatedly made the relaxed atmosphere tense again, and made it more difficult for an agreement to be reached." In fact, it reached the point when I would watch to see what Patten would say each time hopes were raised, because it was obvious he wanted no agreement.
At about this time, Tam Yiu Chung also remarked: "Within the short space of a little over one month (since the unveiling of Patten's package) we have sensed a deterioration and retrogression of Sino-British relations; worsening mutual trust between China and Hong Kong; disagreement among the people of Hong Kong; and a setback for the recognition of the Basic Law. ... The current row about the political system is already taking its toll on the people of Hong Kong who are worried about the future."

And as time went on, that rift grew wider and wider. Yet it was always clear that the majority on the Council genuinely favoured an amicable settlement and a return to the Basic Law, if only Martin Lee and Chris Patten had permitted them to do so. Martin Lee obviously sensed this unwillingness to destabilise Hong Kong, and on several occasions he accidentally allowed his "democratic" camouflage to slip, and reveal his real face. In the "South China Morning Post" on 25 January 1994, when it seemed clear that an amendment would be made to halt Patten's plan in its tracks, he is reported to have said (and did not deny saying): "Governor Chris Patten should consider disbanding the Legislative Council if it amended his political reform package in a way that represented a backward step in democratisation. ... After disbanding the Council he can APPOINT a new group of legislators who truly represent public views." So here was a politician claiming to believe in direct elections actually asking a colonial governor to disband his Council and appoint a new one that would follow his dictates. Who was to decide what public views were? Martin Lee, no doubt. He did not explain how public views would be identified. The Basic Law was not widely understood, and since Martin Lee and his followers were hogging the media, it would be impossible to find out anyone's views except theirs. The tactics Martin Lee was trying were exactly those of Boris Yeltsin, who dismisses his legislators whenever they disagree with him! Not exactly an advertisement for democracy, free speech or representative Government!

Had any one of the other parties made such a preposterous proposal, the media would have made mincemeat of them. But it is an indication of the bias of the press at that time that the suggestion went almost unnoticed. I have kept the news cutting because the sheer hypocrisy of it has seared it on my mind.

Under pressure from the Martin Lee camp, and because Patten himself was champing at the bit to get his unamended destructive package through, the Bill was eventually read for the first time and put before a bills committee for scrutiny in preparation for the second and third readings by the end of the session in 1994.