INTRODUCTION

Councillor Elsie Elliott does not need any introduction to the people of Hong Kong. Her integrity and fearlessness have won her the respect and admiration of most of Hong Kong's poor and disenfranchised inhabitants. The same qualities have won her the fear and hatred of Hong Kong's rich and powerful elite, be it colonial bureaucrats or big business bosses. A glance at these pages will tell you why.

Elsie has, for many years, been elected, by the highest poll, to the Urban Council by an electorate which she has to ignore, by and large, in her work. Her work is with the poor, the oppressed, the raped and robbed, not the comfortable bourgeois that keeps re-electing her. Nevertheless, even they regard her as a "ho yan" - a good person - a term not lightly used by Chinese people, especially of a foreigner. Elsie is part of a splendid tradition, many of whom were women, who have found themselves in China in a relatively privileged position, but who have used that position, be it journalist, historian, teacher or Councillor, to expose the injustice and oppression of the society they found themselves in. Unlike Agnes Smedley, Anna Louise Strong or Nym Wales (Helen Foster Snow), Elsie has not written much, and is correspondingly less well-known. It is for the benefit of those outside of Hong Kong, who do not know of her work that I write this introduction.

Elsie Elliott (nee Hume) was born in 1913 in Newcastle-on-Tyne of a working class family. Her father was a self-educated socialist and a tram conductor. She prospered in school and graduated from Durham University in 1937. She taught in secondary modern schools in Halifax and Hull until 1946. She married in 1944 and went with her husband to China as missionaries with Christian Missions in Many Lands, a Plymouth Brethren organisation. She worked in Kiangsi, at Nanchang and I-feng, becoming steadily disillusioned with the practices of her church. She finally left China in February, 1951, for Hong Kong, where she set up an "illegal" school in a tent for 30 children in Kai Tak New Village, despite obstacles placed in her way by her church. In 1955 she returned to England, but soon got a note from a colleague saying that if she did not return to Hong Kong, the school would be closed. Her husband forbade her, but nevertheless she returned to Hong Kong in 1956 where she has stayed ever since. The school that she runs with Andrew Tu continues to this day and now has over 3000 pupils. She was elected to the Urban Council in 1963, and has enjoyed ever-increasing majorities in each election.
This is not the place to attempt a description of how Hong Kong works. A number of good books already exist that do that. It is enough to characterise it as a thoroughly evil and exploitative society whose members are deprived of elementary human and democratic rights. This condition continues as a direct result of a squalid deal between successive British Governments and the local ruling group. The essence of this bargain is that Whitehall steadfastly refuses to intervene as long as the crucial cash contributions to Britain's sick economy continue to flow in repatriated profits, banked Sterling reserves, defence subsidies etc. This allows the Hong Kong 'authorities' a free hand. I estimate the sum involved to be at least £500 million per year. Neither the givers nor the beneficiaries of this "squeeze" are, I fancy, subject to the investigations of the much-vaunted Independent Commission Against Corruption.

A glimpse of what that entails is depicted in these chapters. She presents, plainly, what she knows, what she has seen, what she has investigated. The nightmare necropolis that is Hong Kong for the masses of Hong Kong emerges clearly from these few cases. Multiply them in your mind by two or three million and you will have, probably for the first time, some idea of the human cost of enfettered free enterprise in a colonial context.

Let me conclude on a personal note. I was in the Hong Kong Police from 1962 to 1968. When Elsie speaks of corruption, brutality, callousness and indifference on the part of Government employees - believe her. Nothing in these chapters belies what I experienced in those six years, moreover, I did it myself. The Hong Kong Government has endlessly tried to discredit Elsie as some kind of paranoid, a nut-case, a bleeding-heart liberal or self-promoting publicist. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Elsie is telling the truth, as she has always done. To my shame, I can corroborate what she says, having seen, practised or connived at it from the other side.

Walter Easby

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