



The Bulletin

The Consumer Council



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消費者委員會於去年四月成立，成立之際，各界人士議論紛紛，對其之意見譏譽參半。其中一些甚而指出此委員會「有名無實」、「勢將失敗」。貨店老板、商人及小販等對其更加以敵視。但另一方面，一般消費者對其成立表示歡迎。彼等並不冀望委員會能建立什麼功績，而只是對能遏止乘機漁利及通貨膨脹之行動深表歡迎。

於一九七四年首季，消費物價指數上揚百份之七，於全年而言即百份之二十八，其間物品價格，尤其食米，高漲了不少。

職權範圍

消費者委員會之職權範圍主要為收集及研究基本貨品，尤其食品方面之價格及此等貨品之批發及零售市場行情之資料。委員會亦向政府提出各項穩固物價及維護消費者之利益之建議。此外，委員會亦注視研究各服務行業（公用事業除外）之工作情形。委員會又接受及考慮各方之建議與投訴，包括有關乘機漁利之投訴。

消費者委員會於處理投訴事件方面最為成功。誠然，委員會亦無任何法律權力，但却能以其「說服力量」獲取商店東主們之合作。大眾之壓力及輿論界對暴利行為之揭發予會協助不少。

委員會自成立十四個月以來所接獲之投訴事件達五千七百多宗，其中所處理者為三份之二，而順利成功地解決者達百份之九十九點五。

「秘密武器」

委員會執行秘書黃張綠萍女士指出：彼等之秘密武器為政府及社會大眾予以之支持。消費者委員會與各政府部門保持密切之聯繫。例如數月之前，委員會接獲多宗投訴指出牛肉被注射水份，花生油內滲有豬油及一些商店將凍肉作新鮮肉類出售等情形。委員

會將此等投訴交由市政事務署處理，並加以控訴。於前，委員會亦接獲投訴謂一珠寶店把「四卡」之金器當作「十八卡」出售，此事件後由工商署負責處理。

黃女士稱：「當一些『問題』商店與法律並無抵觸，因而我們不能採取任何法律行動時，我們便向社會把它加以揭發。一間乾洗公司及電器店於報章受揭發後停止營業，因為顧客們不再光顧而批發商亦拒絕售予新貨品，該兩商店也許以新名號重新營業，但我們之工作是維護消費者之利益而並非使商店結束營業。」

管制物品價格

去年初，一些人士曾促請政府把基本物品之價格加以管制，一位社會知名人士甚而建議政府應把儲備金從英國調回香港以支補食米價格，而消費者委員會則負責物價管制事宜。

但黃女士指出：物價管制頗不易為，尤其香港為一自由經濟之市場。此例可見諸各個設有物品價格管制之國家。去年春天，政府將食米價格臨時加以管制，此舉於香港而言，尚屬首次，而於米價開始下降時，此項管制便被取消。

明顯地，於初期，委員會差不多全力注視食米之問題，因為此乃我們主要食糧，政府急切平穩其供應及價格。初期時又盛傳謠言謂米商利用其專利形勢而獲不合理之利潤及藉「通貨膨脹」一詞欺詐大眾。

塑膠水桶及其他……

除却食米外，消費者委員會亦仔細研究其他食品——如麥、麵粉、麵飽、麵餅、食油、糖、魚、豬肉、菜蔬、生菜、牛肉、凍肉及罐頭等肉食等。

去年末食水短缺期間，消費者投訴稱塑膠水桶價格飛漲達兩三倍。於其時，委員會主席簡悅強爵士立即與塑膠桶製造商召開會議商討對策及設法加工大量生產。廠商們表現至為合作，但天雨隨即下降而食水問題亦因此獲迎刃而解。

去年九月於新學年開始，消費者委員會接到家長投訴謂一些學校藉着課本銷售及訂製校服等事宜求取利潤，因而成立一「行動小組委員會」，並由教育司署副署長高雲·希爾先生出掌主席一職。彼等與出版商、教師聯會等先後磋商，隨後立訂有關此方面之規條為各方面參攷之用。該「行動小組委員會」亦編備一有關教科書之報告書。

「消費主義」

黃女士強調：在過去一年中，一般消費者之觀感及意識有顯著的改變。此轉變可見諸消費者所提出之投訴事件之增加及投訴之內容。

據悉：初期之投訴主要關於貨品價格過高，隨後則是關於服務收費之方面。黃女士指出：「彼等察覺到人們只要覺得物有所值便不反對付出之高價。」消費者委員會接到有關物品之質量及數量之投訴，同時亦知悉消費者渴望知道彼等之權利及責任。

因此，委員會致力使消費者醒覺其權益問題。

於香港，「消費主義」為一頗為新穎之主義。在英、美各國早已設立消費者聯會予以消費者適合之意見，使大家不會受花言巧語之廣告所迷惑，而能切實地認識清楚一件貨品之優劣。

“WHICH”?

在英國，其國內之消費者協會出版一名為WHICH的雜誌，對各類貨品有詳盡介紹。於年前，此雜誌指出港製消費品之弊病至令廠家們大為不悅。但於最近，一港製恤衫却備受讚揚。這雜誌不為廣告客戶所牽制，而這也就是該雜誌對貨品作正直批評之處。

教育「消費者」

由於本港人士之生活水平有所改進，對「消費者之意識」因而更為醒覺，並需求有關此方面之忠告及教育。

消費者委員會有見及此正籌備有關此方面之社會教育工作。該會向海外各國之消費者協會購獲與此有關之影片以助教育本港消費者之事宜。

教育司署方面亦同意把「消費主義」列入學校課程之列。現刻，消費者委員會正敬告各教師們如何向學生們教導有關「消費主義」一事。

購物意見中心

消費者委員會目下正策劃在本港一規模較小政府屋宇區域設立一「購物意見中心」，其形式將與英國之WHICH購物指南中心相同。假若此計劃備受歡迎，委員會計劃在本港其他各區建立同類中心。

據黃女士稱：彼等最為關注者為貧苦的一羣。他們可能設法儲蓄經年以購買一電器機，但隨後却發覺被騙，那當然是不當的。同事

漁利行爲？

何謂「合理利潤」？

消費者委員會對漁利行爲有詳盡之定義及分析，包括：物品價格過高、廣告用詞不當，使顧客感覺錯誤、送遞貨品超時、貨品質量及重量與合約不符、並無履行合約上之條件及故意製造貨品之短缺等。

於最後一點而言，尤為真實。本港之主

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28 Years & 7 Months After

AT the General Committee meeting of December 23rd, 1946, discussions were held on such topics as burglar alarm systems being offered by the Telephone Company, an invitation to the Chamber to make representations to Government on the subject of hawking, a proposed sea school for training local boys in seafaring skills, cargo shipments from Shanghai to Hong Kong, war reparations, the Companies Ordinance, an increased tax on wines and liquors, the ginger trade which at that time constituted Hong Kong's leading export, and talk of British interests buying up a Chinese newspaper in order to give the public a 'fair' representation of news events as some of the stories appearing in the local vernacular press were detrimental to the British image.

That particular meeting, chaired by R. D. Gillespie of ICI (China) Limited, was the first which saw John Black Kite as Secretary of the Committee. May 19th this year saw his last, his 341st General Committee meeting. And the Committee still discusses the Companies Ordinance, cargo, tax, the leading export industry which now happens to be textiles. Now and again it voices its opinion on hawking, and worries about the general image of Hong Kong overseas and takes an active role in defending public interests. Burglar alarm systems and the Sea School are very much a part of Hong Kong.

Jock Kite is also very much a part

of Hong Kong. In the nearly 29 years he has captained the Chamber ship, he has participated in much that has made Hong Kong what it is today, the 17th largest exporter in the world.

John Black Kite was born in Whithorn, Scotland in 1914. His family moved to Birkenhead, Cheshire when he was quite young and it was in Birkenhead that he received his schooling. He joined Pelling Stanley and Company Limited, importers of canned goods, notably Kamchatka Salmon, in Liverpool in 1931. There he claims to have become a very good chit coolie before being promoted to higher things, like cost analysis and so on. He joined J&W Wilson, a paint manufacturing firm in 1937. He was already in the Territorial Army and when war broke out in September 1939, off he went and shortly afterwards was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Dispatches

In January 1943 he was promoted Captain and by April 1945 he had retained the rank of Major. His military service was mostly in the UK and North West Europe and in May 1945 he was mentioned in Dispatches.

JBK first appeared on the Chamber scene on December 1st, 1946 after having served eight months as Private Secretary to the Governor, at that time Sir Mark Young. He had come to Hong Kong in September 1945 as part of the military administration soon after the Japanese surrender. He held the post of staff officer in the



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General Administration Branch until his secondment to Government House.

JBK has been very much a part of the changing scene in Hong Kong trade and industry. He saw Hong Kong as a busy entrepot and the gateway to China. He knew it in 1949 when Shanghai textile men moved their capital, equipment and skill to Hong Kong and the first hanks of cotton yarn were being run off. He knew it when the Korean War forced an embargo on the sale of strategic goods to nearby China and nearly put an end to Hong Kong's 110 years of trading with China. Exports to China, traditionally regarded as the most reliable thermometer of the Colony's economic health, fell from HK\$244 million in March, 1951 to HK\$51 million in December that year.

But the opportunity and the incentive for local industry was there. And JBK remembers with clarity the tremendous verve with which it took

'Hong Kong had literally to export or die. It showed that it had no intention of doing the latter. The trade promotion work undertaken by the Chamber and other trade associations began to pay off. Standards were improving continually and industrialization was truly underway.'

'The development of a local industry meant that the Chamber had a greater role to play, particularly to take an increasing interest in trade promotion activities. During the '50s we cooperated with Government in

arranging Colony exhibits in various international trade fairs and took a leading part in organising and manning the stands.'

JBK often went as a delegate to these earlier fairs, among them being the British Industries Fairs of 1948 to 1953 where the Chamber was actively represented on the Organising Committee. The first participation in a trade fair outside the UK was in 1954 at the Washington State International Trade Fair in Seattle. The success at this Fair meant Hong Kong would be represented at subsequent fairs in the United States.

JBK was a member of the Hong Kong delegation to the First United States World Trade Fair in New York in 1957 and later accompanied the leader of the delegation, the late Mr. U Tat Chee, OBE, to Washington D.C. where they were received by Richard M. Nixon, the then Vice-President. They also paid visits to the Bureau of Foreign Commerce and the Department of Foreign Assets Control of the US Treasury.

The Secretary of the Chamber also took an active part in Hong Kong's participation in fairs held in Frankfurt, at Vienna and in Stockholm. These were in the 50's. By the '60s Hong Kong manufacturers were reaping the benefits of attendance at these earlier fairs and other Chamber staff were being groomed to take over basic overseas promotional activities.

'With the increase in our exports to western markets came problems for domestic producers in our markets. Our textile industry was the fastest to

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grow and it was in this field that Hong Kong was to encounter its greatest difficulties in the way of protectionism and restrictions.

This all started with a Mission in 1957 from Lancashire which put forward proposals for a voluntary agreement to restrict all shipments of Hong Kong manufactured cotton goods to the U.K. No one here took them very seriously as their ground had not been well prepared, but then a violent anti-Hong Kong press campaign started up in the United Kingdom.'

'With strong pressure from Lancashire and the press, the UK Government decided to intervene and in 1958 sent out Sir Frank Lee, Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade, to hold meetings with representatives of our textile industry. Sir Frank was followed out here later in the year by a delegation from the UK Cotton Board headed by Lord Rochdale.'

JBK recalled that someone lost their luggage and they had to sit down at the conference table wearing hastily bought Hong Kong-made shirts.

A committee, the HK Textile Negotiating Committee, representing Hong Kong textile interests had been set up, with the then Chairman of the Chamber, Sir Douglas Clague, in the Chair and Chamber staff handling the secretarial side of things. Talks began in September, 1958 and eventually resulted in the Hong Kong industry giving a unilateral voluntary undertaking for the limitation of shipments of a wide range of woven cotton goods. This was accepted by the UK

Cotton Board on 28th December. It is perhaps worth commenting that this undertaking, drafted late one evening in the Chamber's Boardroom by Messrs. Kite and Sorby on the basis of what had been agreed in the discussions, was the first ever of its kind in the World.

Earlier that year, with a view to offsetting some of the worse effects of the Anti-Hong Kong campaign in the UK press, the Chamber had joined with the Cotton Spinners Association and the Federation of Hong Kong Industries to raise funds for a public relations campaign.

Salutary effect

'We supplied the late Henry Ching, a former editor of the South China Morning Post, with enough material to produce in pamphlet form the 'true story' of Hong Kong and its Textile Industry. These coincidentally arrived on the City Editors' desks of all the National and leading provincial dailies on the very day the textile talks began in Hong Kong and they had a most salutary effect.

'It was then decided to keep up this public relations activity and to shift the emphasis to promotion. We had already appointed a leading UK public relations firm and it was not long before we were distributing pamphlets and films on Hong Kong, its people, and its industries in the UK and in Europe. Soon afterward we further expanded our promotional activity, this time taking in the US.'

Visits on the ground were of great
cont'd. Pg. 25

A Force to be Reckoned With

The Consumer Council

THE Consumer Council's establishment in April 1974 was greeted by a mixed chorus of scepticism, apathy, irritation and even downright anger. 'The toothless watchdog', some critics called it. 'All it has to fight with are 'public pressure' and 'moral pressure' — terms that don't count for much in our mercenary society', mocked a local newspaper.

Shopkeepers, merchants, hawkers and wholesalers not unnaturally tended to eye the newly formed Council with some suspicion and hostility. Consumers generally welcomed the establishment of the Council — not perhaps with overwhelming enthusiasm, for they too were yet to be convinced that the Council was able to work effectively without legal teeth — but anything that might help to put a stop to profiteering and malpractices in the market-place and to stem inflation was to be welcomed.

Those, remember, were the days of really rocketing inflation. (At least, inflation was still making headline news then). In the first three months of 1974, the Consumer Price Index had risen by seven per cent — that's 28 per cent in annual terms. Of particular concern to the housewife was the soaring cost of basic foodstuffs, and above all, rice. In the foodstuffs section of the Consumer Price Index rice rose more than 120 points between the first quarters of 1973 and 1974, and in the first three months of 1974 alone rice prices rose by almost 50 points, or more than 17 per cent.

Thus one of the primary aims of the Council was to study the prices of

basic commodities, particularly foodstuffs, and to recommend to the Government measures which would help to stabilise prices and protect the consumer. This entailed in-depth study of the workings of the wholesale and retail markets. The Council's terms of reference also include study of prices of a selected range of services and the way in which they work (but excluding those provided by the public utilities).

The most widely publicised aspect of the Council's work is undoubtedly the complaints service. Consumers with gripes or suggestions relating to prices, quality, quantity — or anything else for that matter — can make use of the service. It is in handling consumer complaints that the Council has achieved its most remarkable success, and in the process has proved that a 'watchdog' does not have to have legal teeth to be effective.

One still rather doubts whether many Hong Kong shopkeepers would be much moved by 'moral pressure' but there can now be little doubt of the power of 'public pressure' and even more so, of the threat of public exposure through the mass media.

In the 14 months since the Council was established it has received over 5,700 complaints, at the rate of 100 a week. It has acted on two-thirds of these complaints and its success rate is an incredible 99.5 per cent. There have been very few cases indeed where shopkeepers refused to cooperate with the Council, despite its lack of legal powers.

What is the secret of this pheno-

menal success?

The Council's Administrative Secretary, Mrs. Ophelia Rahmin, told *The Bulletin*: 'Our secret weapon is government support, coupled with public support. Where laws appear to have been broken we can refer the complaints to the appropriate Government department for action.

'For example, a few months ago a large number of complaints were reaching the Council about water-injected beef, or shopkeepers who tried to sell frozen meat as fresh meat, or who added lard to peanut oil. These were referred to the Urban Services Department who made several prosecutions. We also had a complaint about a jeweller's shop selling what it called '18 carat' gold, which was in fact only 4 carat gold. The Commerce and Industry Department took action on this one.'

Exposure

'Secondly, in cases where there doesn't appear to have been a clear infringement of the law — and as you know it takes a long time to get new laws enacted — we can expose the shop. We've fortunately only had to do this twice, once with a dry cleaning company and again with an audio hi-fi shop. In both cases the shop went out of business shortly after we exposed them. After we got their names published in the press — and the press were very cooperative on this — customers avoided them, and their wholesalers even refused to let them have new goods on credit. It could well be that these shops have re-opened

under new names, but our job is to protect the consumer, not to ruin businesses. So long as they stop cheating the consumer we are happy.'

Mrs. Rahmin emphasised that such exposure was very much a last resort, to be used after all else had failed. But in one of the cases mentioned above the shopkeeper had actually driven the Council's officer out of the shop! Clearly, under such circumstances public exposure is a very powerful deterrent — more powerful than legislative punishment, particularly if the latter consists merely of a relatively small fine.

Understandably many of the Council's early meetings were concerned largely with the rice problem, because rice is the staple foodstuff in the local diet, and because the Government was eager to seek ways of stabilising rice supplies and prices. There were rumours of rice merchants making an unreasonable profit through monopoly, or of using inflation to cheat people. Such rumours spread rapidly. But the scope of the Council's studies also extended to other basic foodstuffs — wheat, bread, flour, noodles, cooking oil, kerosene, sugar, fish, pork, vegetables, fruit, beef, frozen meat and tinned meat.

At the same time, the Council will investigate whatever happens to be the most frequent or serious complaint at a particular time.

'For example,' said Mrs. Rahmin, 'during the water shortage late last year, there was a flood of complaints from consumers about the prices of plastic buckets which had doubled or

trebled overnight. Our Chairman at that time, Sir Y. K. Kan, immediately called a meeting with manufacturers of plastic buckets in an attempt to control retail prices and to get many more plastic buckets on the market as quickly as possible. The manufacturers were very cooperative and they stepped up their plastic bucket production. The only trouble was, as soon as they did that the rains came, the water shortage was solved and they were left with thousands of unwanted plastic buckets on their hands! Eventually the problem was solved by melting the buckets down'.

Another rash of complaints came to the Council at the beginning of the school year in September when parents complained about schools profiteering from the sale of books, uniforms, etc. The Council's answer was to set up an action committee, chaired by the Deputy Director of Education, Colvyn Haye. This has held several meetings with publishers, teachers' associations and other relevant bodies to examine the problem, and recommend action. A Code of Practice was drawn up for the Education Department, and this has helped greatly in curbing malpractices in the sale of school items. The Committee has also prepared a report on school textbooks.

Mrs. Rahmin told *The Bulletin* of a striking change she has noticed in consumers' attitudes and the level of consumer awareness over the past year or so. This is evidence by the gradually increasing number of complaints, and by the change in the na-

ture of these complaints.

'At first the public complained mainly about straightforward over-charging, and particularly over-charging on basic commodities. Then complaints began to come in about the prices of services and of more advanced commodities. We discovered that people don't object so much to the high cost of a product, as long as they feel it's worth it. Now we get a lot of complaints about quality as well as quantity. We have also learned that consumers would like to know their rights and responsibilities.'

Thus one of the Council's major achievements has been to foster consumer awareness, to make consumers more conscious of their rights. And now that the Council's effectiveness is no longer in doubt, consumers do not hesitate in making use of it. The Council provides an ideal channel, formerly lacking, to which their complaints can be directed.

Consumerism

'Consumerism' is a relatively new concept here. In the UK and the USA there have for long been consumers' associations giving advice to consumers and sometimes leading a crusade against a particular brand or product. While the activities of people like Ralph Nader in the US have not always been welcomed by the manufacturer, they have undoubtedly helped to raise quality and safety standards and to educate the consumer. When the consumer is assaulted from all sides by the exaggerated claims and colourful language of advertisers and

sales material it is of enormous value to be given advice from the consumer point-of-view, to have the faults and shortcomings of a product pointed out.

In the UK the British Consumers' Association has its own magazine, entitled *Which?* This has incurred the wrath of many a Hong Kong manufacturer in the past by pointing out the faults of HK-made consumer goods. But it has also given credit where it is due. Recently a HK-made shirt was listed as the best buy in terms of value for money. One of the great strengths of *Which?*, that enables it to remain unbiased, is the fact that none of its finance comes from advertising. It is truly independent.

As Hong Kong becomes an increasingly consumer-oriented society, and as standards of living improve, one can see the need for a similar kind of consumer association here to educate and give advice to the consumer. This is a need which the Consumer Council seems well equipped to fill. Much of the Council's current attention is being focussed on consumer education and it is planned to launch a comprehensive programme with the aid of films from overseas consumer associations. The Education Department has also agreed to include Consumerism in its Third Year school syllabus. "Now one of the Council's tasks will have to be to teach the teachers how to teach consumerism," said Mrs. Rahmin.

The Council is also planning to set up a 'Shopping Advice Centre' pat-

terned after the UK *Which?* shops. The pilot scheme envisages opening a shop in one of the Government housing estates and if the scheme is successful similar centres will be established throughout Hong Kong.

Government housing estates are the best places for these shops since that is where such a service is most needed. 'After all', said Mrs. Rahmin with a smile, 'We don't mind so much if the rich are cheated. Our concern is to help the man who lives in a resettlement estate and saves for a whole year to buy a TV set and then gets cheated.'

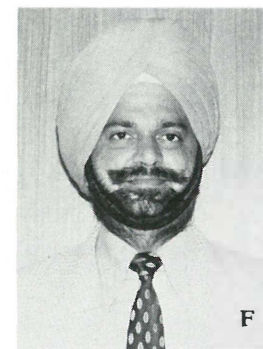
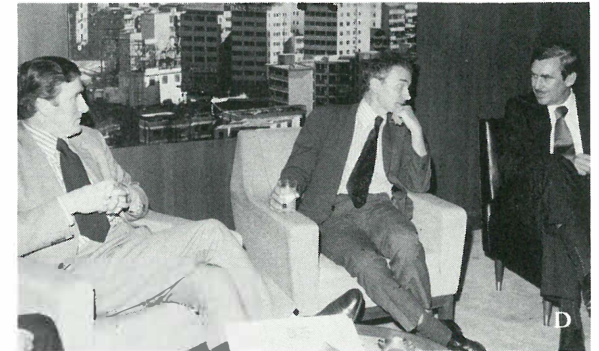
Making a profit

The Council was set up to combat 'profiteering'. But exactly what is a 'reasonable profit'? As a guideline the Council has drawn up a comprehensive list of various types of profiteering, ranging from fraudulent or misleading advertising to downright overcharging. The list includes such things as delivering used or outdated goods, the sale of adulterated foodstuffs, short weight, failure to supply promised maintenance, breaking verbal promises and creating local monopolies or shortages.

The Council would be the first to agree that a commercial enterprise is entitled to make a profit, and would certainly not take any action against a company without a thorough investigation. When a complaint against overcharging is received the Council will examine in detail the location of the company concerned and its accounts with regard to overheads

Picture Briefing

- A. Mrs. Ophelia Rahmin, Secretary of the Consumer Council, was the guest of the Home Affairs Committee on May 9th when she explained the work of the Council. Seen with her is the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. J. L. Marden, MA.
- B. Mr. J. Zelislowski, Director of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade, held discussions with the East European Area Committee on May 16th. He is seen here with Mr. E. J. S. Tsu, Chairman of the Committee (right) and Mr. Henry Woo of the TDC.
- C. A luncheon talk was held in the Hilton Hotel on May 19th for members of the South America Area Section. Guest speaker was Mr. T. E. Dowd, OBE, Honorary Treasurer of the British-Chilean Chamber of Commerce. He spoke on the political and economic aspects of Chile.
- D. Chamber Council members held an informal discussion session with two visiting Members of Parliament on May 21st. Mr. M. T. F. McGuire (left) and Mr. D. E. T. Luard (centre) are seen here with the Chairman, Mr. Peter Foxon.
- E. A Chinese banquet was given by Chamber members on May 22nd in honour of the retiring Director of the Chamber, Mr. J. B. Kite (right). A gift from members was presented to him by the Chairman.
- F. Mr. H. C. S. Dhody, First Secretary at the Indian Commission, is the subject of this month's Pen Profile (see Page 23).



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and rentals before a verdict is reached.

But unlike its counterparts in the US and some other countries, the Council has no legal authority to examine companies' accounts. 'But so far we have found local companies very willing to cooperate on this matter, and to explain why they are charging a particular price. The supermarkets we find particularly helpful', said Mrs. Rahmin.

Legal powers

The Bulletin asked Mrs. Rahmin whether the Council was planning to seek wider legal powers. She confirmed that the main weapon of the Council would always be public support. But she added there was a possibility of a claims court being established in Hong Kong, where Government would be asked to handle consumer complaints. For a small fee of, say \$20, the consumer could make use of this facility.

However, it is too early in Hong Kong for the kind of independent consumer courts that exist in some countries.

There is a Legal Committee, chaired by a member of the Council. This studies foreign legislation and recommends new legislation to Government. Before the establishment of this committee the Council itself studied the existing consumer-protection legislation in Hong Kong, namely the Merchandise Marks Ordinance and the Weights and Measures Ordinance, and recommended several amendments, all of

which were accepted by Government.

In all its work the Council co-operates closely with most of the Government departments, the DC&I, the USD and the Police in particular, as well as with non-Government bodies like the Chamber, the CMA and the Tourist Association. Complaints from tourists are regularly referred to the Council for action.

The Council is also actively promoting the idea of trade associations that will enable merchants of the same trade to join forces in working to protect their interests. The existence of such associations would further facilitate contact between the Council and commerce and industry.

A point to the Council

The Consumer Council seems to have achieved a degree of success which even its most enthusiastic advocates could hardly have envisaged 14 months ago. The General Consumer Price Index for April was standing at 184, one point lower than its level a year earlier.

To spell it out, that means that inflation has been well and truly conquered in Hong Kong, while in other countries it has only slowed down but remains a big problem. There are of course other reasons for this turnabout (not the least being a continued supply of foodstuffs from China at stable prices), but one of the 'internal' factors responsible for the inflation of past months, by which we mean the profiteering of some local merchants, appears to have been curtailed effectively by the Council.

The UK in the EEC

AT a luncheon hosted by the UK Area Committee on June 10th, the guest speaker, Mr. David Rae Smith, who is the Senior Partner of Deloitte and Co., a prominent UK firm of chartered accountants, spoke to Chamber Members on the UK's membership in the EEC and its relevance to HK-UK trade. We reproduce below the text of Mr Rae Smith's talk.

'The aim of this talk is to review the ways in which Hong Kong trade with the UK could develop in the immediate future now that the UK is finally committed to the EEC, and to explore whether HK would have fared any better if the referendum had gone the other way.

Judged by the volume of trade, last year was disappointing. After allowing for inflation, HK exports to the UK fell by about 20 per cent in 1974, after showing an increase of about this amount in 1973. The decline intensified in the first two months of 1975.

As part of the first stage of the adoption of EEC external tariffs, in 1974 the UK started to phase out the old Commonwealth Preference Scheme. However, although this may have led to a decline in the volume of HK exports, a similar decline occurred in HK trade with the other EEC countries.

Looking a little further back, until 1972, HK enjoyed preferential trading status for textiles under the Commonwealth Preference Scheme. The colony's allocated quota of imports was 23 per cent of UK's

global quota of yarn and 36 per cent of UK's global quota of cotton piece-goods. Only India was granted a larger quota for yarn.

In addition, all countries could compete for the unallocated parts of the UK's global import quotas of piecegoods and yarn.

In 1972, although HK was still allocated the same quotas as before, 15 per cent import duties were imposed on cotton goods and 17 per cent on clothing. This was the first of a series of restrictions which the UK started to place on our mutual trade.

In 1973 the UK introduced an import quota of polyester/cotton from all low cost producers. There had previously been no quota for this material. A degree of flexibility between the two quotas helped to mitigate this further restriction.

Even in 1973, HK's position was still privileged. All other countries except India had no special allocation and had to compete for the unallocated balance of the global quota.

However, the extent of HK's privileged access to UK markets was without doubt eroded by the imposition of duties and new quotas in the years leading up to the UK's entry into the Common Market.

The main reasons for this erosion were the problems and continued decline of the UK domestic market and its own textile industry.

Firstly, UK demand for clothing in 1974 was at least 16 per cent below the 1972 level (at constant prices), and secondly, UK producers' costs were rising at a much faster rate than

those of the low cost producing countries such as HK.

In early 1975 the problems of the UK industry have intensified; three quarters of the labour force is on short time and 3,000 jobs have been lost in a dozen mill closures since January.

In the light of this recent history and the increasing internal problems of the UK producers, it must be doubtful whether HK's trading position with the UK would have been preserved any better if the UK had not started to adopt the EEC external tariffs. The UK Government would still have been preoccupied with domestic problems; Mr. Wilson was quoted in *The Times* of May 12th 1975 as saying that 'he rejected artificial interference with imports, except where imports were subsidised, as in textiles, clothing and perhaps some other industries'.

HK—EEC trade

I turn now to HK trade with the other EEC countries. The relevant EEC regulations are: Firstly, the common external tariff against imports. Secondly, the Generalised Scheme of Preference (GSP) under which goods from certain developing countries are permitted entry up to a maximum level at either zero, or a preferential rate of duty. Thirdly, the exclusion of HK textiles and footwear from the GSP on the grounds that they were already supercompetitive. However most of the colony's low cost competitors benefit from GSP (eg. S. Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, India, Pakistan and

Yugoslavia).

The colony's exports to the original six EEC countries grew by 112 per cent between 1969 and 1973, and the balance of trade also more than doubled.

These facts demonstrate HK's ability to penetrate the other EEC markets despite the preferential treatment of the low cost competitors. In 1974, exports to the other EEC countries fell back by 27 per cent from the peak volume of 1973. Imports however fell even more, so that the value of HK's trading surplus with the other EEC countries again more than doubled to HK\$731 million.

Part of the decline in exports was due to unilateral action by HK itself. For example, sales of man-made fibres to West Germany were growing so fast that HK decided to limit them to 40 million square yards (on the assumption presumably that Bonn would act if the colony did not).

The decline in HK's exports to the other EEC countries in 1974 was slightly greater than that for the UK. This fact supports my earlier conclusion that the decline in UK trade could have been expected to happen whether or not the UK had entered the EEC.

In addition to competitive successes, it may be possible for HK to achieve, between now and 1978, certain improvements in existing bilateral trading agreements (including those with the EEC) under the new Arrangement Regarding International Trade in Textiles (Multi-Fibre Arrangement) which was drawn up under GATT.

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The UK has secured the inclusion of HK non-leather footwear in the GSP for 1975, but was unable to do so for the colony's textiles. However, one of the Common Market renegotiation terms of the UK was an undertaking to review HK's position for the 1976 GSP.

Now that the referendum has finally confirmed the UK's decision to join the EEC, we must hope that the efforts of our businessmen and politicians will concentrate on establishing a constructive role for the UK within it. It takes time to develop new contacts, to establish products in new markets and to become familiar with new laws and regulations. Many of us believe that UK businessmen have to redevelop the confidence to penetrate new markets, to innovate and to invest. This is going to be a slow process while we are afflicted with inflation at rates of 20 per cent or more, but it will be helped by confidence that EEC membership is now permanent.

Strong friends

It is better to have strong friends than weak ones within the EEC. The UK would be a more useful friend to HK if it were less beset by economic problems, and particularly if its domestic textile industry were stronger. We must hope that conditions now exist to permit it to recover.

The UK's friendship is nevertheless of some value, despite its present difficulties. It seems like that some agreement to include HK into the 1976 GSP will result from UK support. This may either grant HK a portion of

the already existing tariff quota of 500 million units of account (£208 million) at the expense of other textile importers; or grant HK a quota in addition to that which exists, increasing the EEC's total tariff quota.

The first alternative will be more popular with community members, most of the domestic textile industries of which are experiencing severe difficulties. The second will appeal more to HK's competitors.

Although 1974 may have seemed disappointing to HK businessmen judged by volume of exports, we in the UK both admire and must learn to imitate HK's ability to penetrate new markets. I do not believe that you will be over-awed by any quotas or tariff barriers that have been raised to control the development of trade between the colony and the UK.

The enormous market which the EEC countries represent offers opportunities to both of us to rethink our marketing strategies within Europe, and increase the effort we devote to marketing and product quality. It should also encourage us to invest in order to follow up opportunities in traditional markets and create new ones.

HONG KONG DIARY 1976

We would like to remind Members that the closing date for orders for the Chamber's exclusive desk diary is June 27th. For more information please call the Public Relations Department at 5-237177 Ext. 37.

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Pen Profile

H. C. S. Dhody

HAVING come here from Afghanistan, Her Charan Singh Dhody has found Hong Kong quite different from his previous assignment. Dhody, as he is called by his friends and associates, is First Secretary in charge of Commercial Relations at the Indian Commission.

He says, 'Afghanistan is a developing country. It is worlds apart from Hong Kong. It is a sparsely populated country, with a population of approximately 15 million. It has its own, what I would term, 'rugged', beauty.

'There is tremendous scope for development in Afghanistan. India is doing her part. She runs the second largest assistance programme in the country. India extends assistance to its neighbours and certain countries in Africa through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme. In Afghanistan, the ITEC programme embraces widely diverse fields such as engineering, the preservation of monuments, etc.'

Dhody's posting in Afghanistan gave him a chance to use the language he had been allocated to learn by the Foreign Service, Persian.

'In the Indian Foreign Service, one is allocated a compulsory foreign language and one must pass the language examination before one is fully accepted into the Service. Otherwise it's back to the books and still on probation.'

'The average yearly intake into the Indian Foreign Service is about 10 or 12. Entrance is difficult because it is an all-India competition and the number taken in depends on the

vacancies existing in any one year.'

Dhody then went through a training period of 20 months. First stop was Mussori, about 120 miles from Delhi, which is a hill station. There Dhody, other Foreign Service entrants and groups from other Indian Services received a comprehensive six-month basic grounding course in law, economics, political science, etc. Then it was to Delhi where he enrolled in courses offered by independent institutions, such as the School of International Studies and the Institute of Foreign Trade.

Dhody explained, 'The Indian Foreign Service is based on generalist thinking, that most of the members are adept at handling various aspects of Foreign Service work. There are pros and cons for both the generalist and the specialist idea but as a generalist, I like to think that we have a much wider vision.'

Charan Dhody was born in Rawalpindi in August 1941. It was then part of India but in 1947, the partition made it the capital of the new state of Pakistan.

What did this change mean for the Dhody family?

'For the older people, it meant uprooting and starting life all over again. It had very little effect on me — I was only six years old'.

The Dhody family settled in a town 40 miles from Delhi where the first bullets were fired to herald the beginning of the Indian War of Independence of the late 1850's. Meerut is its name and the first bullet was fired no more than 300 yards away from the

J B K - continued

house which the Dhody family settled into in 1946.

Dhody's early education was in Meerut. He then went on to take science at university. However, he had always maintained an interest in English Literature and decided to take up post-graduate work in that as well as in Chemistry. Dhody did not finish these studies, to the disappointment of his professors who saw in him much potential. In 1962 came the border dispute with China and an emergency was declared in India. Dhody joined the Army in 1963.

He spent the first six months training in Madras and afterwards was commissioned into the Corps of Engineers. He found the Army a rather interesting career and stayed in it for five years, after which he joined the Foreign Service.

He married shortly before leaving for Afghanistan. The marriage was arranged 'in a way', he explains, but he had met his bride-to-be a number of times before the ceremony. The Dhodys now have a 20-month old daughter.

He arrived in Hong Kong in November 1974 and quickly settled into his job.

He explained, 'Goods from India constitute less than one per cent of Hong Kong's imports. In 1974 the total amount of imports of Indian origin was HK\$218 million. Major items were non-metallic mineral manufactures like diamonds and other gems (which in fact accounted for nearly half the value of imports); tex-

tile yarn, fabrics, made-up articles and related products; non-ferrous metals; fruits and vegetables; electric machinery; iron and steel products; dyeing, tanning and colouring materials; manufactures; chemicals and compounds and pharmaceutical products.'

'Trade between Hong Kong and India is not all it could and should be. We shall be stepping up our trade promotion efforts here. Already an industrial exhibition stressing the technical progress that has taken place in India in the last few years is being planned for February 1976.'

Dhody continued, 'There are two other fields in which there is a great deal of scope for development.

New fields

'India has a ready supply of labour and technical know-how where costs compare very favourably with Hong Kong and other areas. What we would like to see is a tie-up between a local entrepreneur and a manufacturer in India to produce goods to be marketed mainly in third countries.'

'India does encourage foreign investment. Two zones have been earmarked for investment: the Kandla Free Trade Zone and the Santa Cruz Electronics Export Processing Zone. These two zones were established primarily for export-oriented industries.'

Mr. Dhody and his commercial staff are looking forward to enquiries from Members about these trading opportunities. He can be contacted at the Commission office at 303, AIA Building, Stubbs Road.

help to our consultants and JBK had a busy time from 1960 to 1964 on visits to Europe, getting around and meeting the press and local industrial and commercial associations, among whom many lasting connections were established, to the benefit of Chamber members.

At a later stage when the Trade Development Council had been set up Jock's experience was put to good use in carrying out preliminary surveys of markets not already fully developed.

The Chamber's healthy finances in the late sixties, combined with the TDC's assuming (correctly) the mantle of the Colony's chief trade promotion agency, led the Committee to send Jock off on an exploratory round of UK Chambers of Commerce to see if there were any ideas to be gathered as to ways in which our Chamber's service to members could be improved. Out of this tour developed the re-organization of our Committee structure and the complete re-vamping of International Trade Department with its area sections, now served by an ever increasingly expert staff.

In the public field, JBK was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1961. He was an active member of the Royal Hong Kong Defence Force from its establishment for 12 years and has been on the reserve ever since (though his uniform now needs a bit of letting out). In his personal capacity he has served on numerous government panels and boards such as those considering Landlord and Tenant matters, Fair Rent Increases, Review of Deten-

tion Orders made under Emergency Regulations and on the Employment Service Committee of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

He claims, modestly, to have been as surprised as he was delighted when in recognition of his services to Commerce and Industry, he was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the 1971 New Year Honours List.

What of the Chamber since JBK first minuted a General Committee meeting?

In 1946 membership of the Chamber stood at under 400. Today that figure has more than quadrupled. Staff at that time could be counted on one hand. The number of people employed by the Chamber is now in the 60's. The Chamber has moved from a very small office in the Hongkong Bank Building to nearly half a floor in Union House. In 1951 the number of certificates of origin processed by the Chamber was 14,000. By 1970 the annual figure had reached 185,000. The Chamber was processing less than 5,000 trade enquiries in the early 50's. It now processes over 15,000.

The 'chief hired assassin' is how Jock Kite has often referred to himself. In his 29 years with the Chamber, he has served under 14 chairmen and has either written or had a hand in the writing of 28 annual reports. As Director, he has been a part of much that has been significant to the Chamber, and to commerce and industry in Hong Kong. Members and staff wish him a long and happy retirement.



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婦們對物品短缺之謠言尤為敏感。但許多時，此類謠言為商人們所故意傳播，以期清售其本身存貨，從中獲利。

基本上，消費者委員會原則上同意商號應獲得洽當利潤。當彼接到有關漁利之投訴時，首先，彼將詳細考慮該商店之地點及其經營所需開支等，然後作判決。

舉例言之，最近，委員會審閱汽水供應商之賬目而發覺雖然砂糖價格下降不少，但汽水商們則未能以舊價銷售飲品。

雖然，本港之消費者委員會並無法定權力檢閱公司之賬目，但據悉各公司於此方面表現最為合作，彼等向委員會解釋詳盡加價之原因。在這方面，各超級市場予以委員會之協助尤多。

「投訴法庭」

問及消費者委員會會否考慮增加其法律職權時，黃女士強調委員會主要武器為大眾予以之支持。

也許在將來，香港將仿效其他各國而建立「消費者投訴法庭」，由政府處理消費者之投訴事件，每宗收費少許。但現今一切尚言之過早。

於消費者法例立訂方面，消費者委員會屬下之「法案小組委員會」目下正仔細審閱有關此方面之法案及向政府建議新法案之釐訂，使消費者利益獲得合理之保障及維護。

多方面合作

除却各政府部門外，消費者委員會與本港各機構，如本總商會、廠商會及旅遊協會等保持密切之聯繫。

當旅遊協會從訪港遊客接到投訴時便轉交消費者委員會處理。

委員會亦積極鼓勵各行業組合聯會以便相互聯絡及維護相互之利益。

成績輝煌

消費者委員會成立之歷史雖只有短短的

十四個月，但其工作成績頗為不俗。

本年四月，本港消費物價指數為一八四點，較前一年下降了一點。換言之，本港之通貨膨脹問題已被征服，而在世界其他各國，通貨膨脹雖已和緩下來，但仍是一難題。

誠然，其間當有其他因素使本港之通貨膨脹問題有所收善（如中國大陸食品入口充足及價格穩定等），但本港內陸之因素——即商人們漁利問題明顯地已受到消費者委員會有效地控制。

正如黃張綠萍女士所說：「我們最終目標是制止漁利行為。只有奸商們才憂慮我們之存在！」

本會執行董事

祈德先生簡介

本總商會執行董事祈德先生行將於六月底卸任榮休。彼於總商會服務長達二十九年，對商會及工商界之貢獻殊多。特將其履歷及功業作一簡介，以饗會友。並於此祝祈德先生今後生活愉快。

原籍蘇格蘭

祈德先生於一九一四年在蘇格蘭誕生。於年幼時隨家人移居英國西部之赤夏郡，及在該處受教育。

一九三一年，祈氏加入利物浦一貿易公司服務，負責罐頭食品之入口，此工作使祈氏認識入口之基本知識。

一九三七年，彼轉往一漆油製造廠工作，於一九三九年，大戰爆發，祈德先生效忠蘇格蘭部隊，開始其戎馬生涯。於一九四三年，彼擢升為上尉，及於一九四五年又獲升少校。其軍旅生涯大部份是在英國及歐洲西北渡過。

蒞港履任

祈氏於一九四五年九月隨軍隊行政部抵港後不久加入港督府工作，為港督——楊格爵士之私人秘書，歷時約八個月。

一九四六年十二月一日，祈德先生加入總商會服務，担任秘書長一職。

於其時，總商會會員商號約共四百間，時至今日已增加四倍有多。於該時，商會會址設香港上海滙豐銀行大廈一小型辦公室內，職員人數寥寥可數。現今，本會位設於仁行，佔地約十樓之半層樓面，而職員人數約共七十人。

今非昔比

於一九五一年，由本會簽發之產地來源證約一萬四千份，但於一九七〇年，此數字躍增為十八萬五千份。於商業諮詢函件方面，於一九五〇年初，商會每年只接獲五千多宗此類諮詢，而現在則達一萬五千多宗。

但另一方面，在這些年來，商業董事局在每月召開之董事會內所研討事項均同樣重要。

於一九四六年十二月二十三日由祈德先生負責秘書一職之第一個董事會上，董事們所商討之問題包括：由電話公司所建議之防盜系統，商會應政府邀請派代表與政府磋商有關小販買賣事宜、從上海運往本港之貨物、公司法案及加收酒類課稅等。

而二十九年後之今天，於五月十九日，當祈德先生出席其退休前最後一次董事局例會上，董事們仍是商討着公司法案、貨物運輸、小販及課稅等各項課題。

第十七把交椅

祈德先生指出：在過去二十九年來目睹香港工商業之蛻變。現今，香港已成爲世界第十七位主要出口地之。

彼視香港爲貨物運輸中心及中國出入口門戶。從香港運往中國之出口情形可見香港

本身之經濟狀況是否健全。但此項貿易總值已由一九五一年三月之港幣二億四千四百萬元下降至港幣五千一百萬元。

但祈氏強調：本港工業仍是充滿潛力。彼謂：「香港之生存有賴其出口表現，本會及其他商團均致力促進本港貿易。在一九五〇年代，我們與政府鼎力合作安排本港出席國際貿易展覽會之事宜。」祈氏先後多次參展。其間包括英國工業貿易會、在西雅圖舉行之華盛頓國際貿易會、在紐約第一屆美國世界貿易展覽會及在德國法蘭克福、維也納及斯德哥爾摩等地舉辦之多個貿易會等。

貿易限制

據祈氏稱：「本港之紡織業成長迅速，但亦遭遇到在貿易限制上最多之困難。」

於一九五七年，英國棉業委員會建議香港自動協議限制港製棉織品輸往英國，該委員會隨後派代表團與本港紡織界人士磋商。後者組成一「香港紡織品談判委員會」，並由本會當年主席——祈德爵士——出任委員會主席。談判結果香港自動協議對多類棉織品出口加以限制。

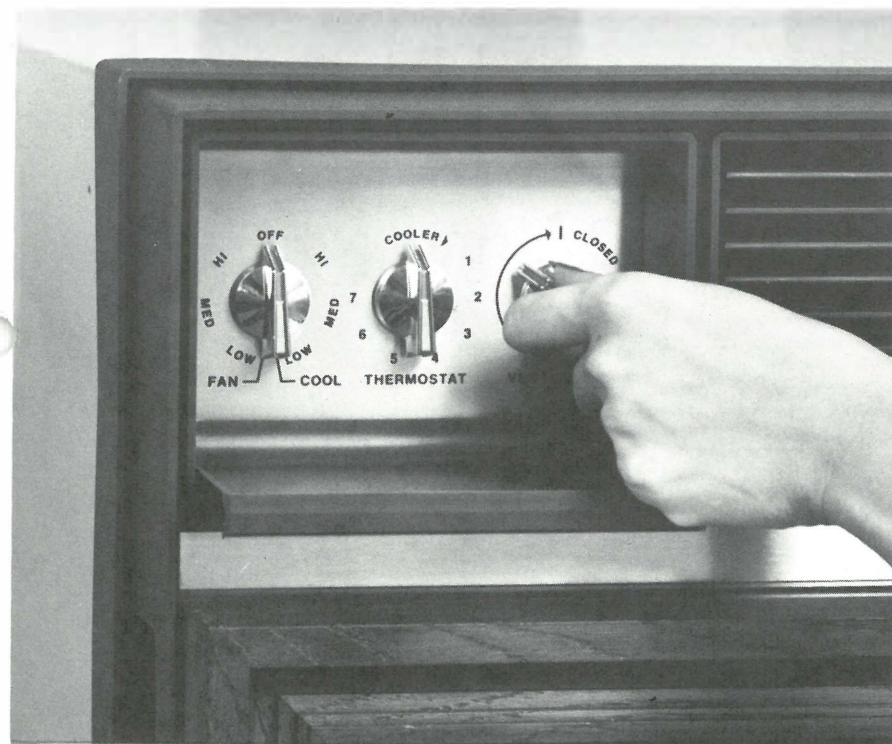
足跡遍全球

於一九六〇至六四年間，祈氏遍訪歐洲各國與當地新聞界及工商社團磋商接洽。建立了密切之聯繫。隨後他又往訪英國各總商會研究如何改進本總會之會務政制等事宜。於一九七〇年，總商會內部重組，國際貿易部十二個貿易分區相繼成立，予以會員商號提供更完善之服務。

獲賜勳銜

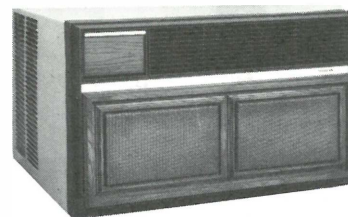
除此之外，祈德先生亦被委任出席多個政府委員會及香港服務聯會之職業輔導小組等要職。

祈氏於一九六一年被委任爲太平紳士，於一九七一年獲女皇頒贈OBE勳銜，嘉賞其對工商界之貢獻。



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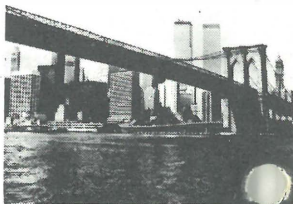
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