

Convention News

SOCIAL MISSION OF CHURCH

THE draft document's recommendations dealing with housing and public transport were discussed at the last meeting of Group 7 (November 3). A delegate expressed the wish that residents in resettlement estates whose financial position had improved over the year would vacate their premises to make way for more deserving cases. However it was agreed that although this idea was a very good one, it would not be very practicable to include it in the document in the form of a recommendation.

The advisability of stricter rent controls was also debated. For the stability of the community as a whole and the mental well-being of individuals, security of tenure is very important; but without rent control there would be insufficient security. A delegate called attention to the danger of over-strict controls: there remains an enormous amount of building of residential blocks to be done. Government cannot do this single-handed and so private enterprise must be coaxed into the construction of domestic premises. But who will invest his money in building unless guaranteed a return comparable to that available from other sources? The main problem seems to be control in the private sector: in the public sector control already exists and there has been only one increase in rent since 1954. The consensus of opinion at the meeting seemed to be that too much or too little control is equally undesirable and that the protection afforded by recent legislation should be extended to include, for example, commercial and industrial premises.

With regard to transport a delegate remarked that the recommendations contain little that directly concerns us Catholics and what we can do as a practical contribution to remedy transport problems. He therefore proposed recommending the examination of the possibility of more Catholic schools in the same district cooperating in providing a bus service for their students and in staggering the hours for beginning and ending school. Some speakers felt that the high cost of maintaining and running a school bus would mean fares that few pupils could afford. In reply, a delegate, tongue in cheek, said that even if only the well-to-do students travelled by school bus, this would at least mean fewer private cars on the road in the early morning bringing children to school.

Another suggestion to ease early morning overcrowding of public transport and traffic congestion was to make a survey of the students attending Catholic schools, and find out for a start how many cross the harbour to go to school. Then perhaps sister schools in Hong Kong and Kowloon could arrange for an exchange of these students. Moreover we should encourage our schools to take in neighbourhood children. This

applies especially to secondary schools as most primary pupils do in fact attend schools near their homes. A nun quoted the example of a New Territories Primary 6 student who chose a school in Aberdeen for his secondary education, unaware of where Aberdeen was! Other students put down as their first choice suburban schools in the belief that competition for entry into these would be less keen than for more centrally situated ones.

It was suggested that better use could be made of the railway to ease the transport situation. Difficulties concerning the single-track system and the fact that there is only one line would seem to raise insurmountable problems here. The possibility of a monorail was mentioned. A delegate stated that Government, in view of the 1997 expiry of the NT lease, is unwilling to invest the necessary funds to tackle Hong Kong's traffic and transport problems in a sufficiently radical way. Another delegate wanted to know why we have to be so old-fashioned in our thinking, adopting solutions to our traffic problems that have been judged obsolete elsewhere.

In order to ensure we make important recommendations ("they shouldn't sound like crank letters to the SCMP") a delegate stated that we should consider the practicality of our suggestions. Where, for instance, are the costs of improved transport and an easing of congestion to come from? This delegate said that the present car tax is much too low. Here is one example (income tax is another) where the rich are being over-protected and are not paying as much as elsewhere for what they are getting.

A final proposal was the ending of the present franchise granted to the bus companies. Transport is an important social service which, like others, e.g. education, medical services, etc. Government should take over. Or at least there should be the possibility of competition between private operators: anything, in fact, but the present monopoly arrangement.

At its next meeting (November 17) group 7 will try to come to a decision regarding the recommendation about rent control and then pass on to discuss corruption, the first topic of the section entitled Moral Environment (ch.V, B).

COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

THE members of Group 8 at their last meeting (November 4) finished their discussion of the section of the draft document dealing with the radio and moved on to debate the paragraphs concerning television.

In accordance with a decision taken at the previous meeting, the desirability of recommending that the diocese set up a recording studio was debated. This was described as a studio, small perhaps, but

professionally equipped, for making recordings suitable for broadcasts. However it would not be justified to ask for such if its usefulness were limited just to preparing radio programmes. Other diocesan organisations, e.g. the liturgical and catechetical commissions also need facilities for recording. It was pointed out in response to a question that the diocese already needs such a studio now and will have greater need for it in the future.

The draft deals briefly with the topic of television. It recommends (a) the production of "good, entertaining, educative programmes of general interest" that would get across Christian values in an indirect way, and (b) encouraging talented script writers to enter this field.

A delegate said that no one is likely to object to these two recommendations but that the whole section needs to be expanded. TV has fast become the most popular of the mass communications media: all classes of people watch it. It is time to study what should be the Church's role in TV, now and in the future. It is not too early to consider the feasibility of sponsoring or producing films for TV and setting up a studio of our own for this or for training purposes. Technical training is always required: here in Hong Kong there is a great dearth of well-trained professionals in every branch of TV. This has resulted in the abominably low standard of locally produced programmes. It is just not good enough that we should be made to suffer the rubbish we are served up with in the interests of people seeking a quick return for their money.

We should also examine the use of TV for educational and instructional purposes. What preparations are our schools making for ETV? Nowadays far wider use is being made of closed circuit and video tape television: we should be alive to these possibilities.

A delegate mentioned that the Television Code of Hong Kong ought perhaps to be commended. However, it was pointed out that just now a new Code is being prepared and will appear within the next few months. Should perhaps our document spell out what we expect from this new Code? Some at least of the principles

contained in the present Code might well be included. In this context strong criticism was voiced of the "narrow and prejudiced" way certain of the prescriptions of the present Code in the matter of religious programmes are interpreted by one of the TV stations.

The effectiveness of writing to the newspapers letters of criticism of radio and TV programmes was mentioned and reference made to the current series of letters in the SCMP regarding the near-disappearance of serious music on Radio Hong Kong. In some countries there are organised groups of viewers—Look, Listen or Teleclubs—who meet to discuss programmes and make their views known in the proper quarters.

It was pointed out that Christians form a sizable minority and that minorities do have rights; we should not let our requests for more time for religious programmes be fobbed off with the easy comment: "There is no demand for such programmes." A short programme at the beginning or end of the day, perhaps in the form of a Thought for the Day, would be appreciated not just by Christians alone but by all believers in God.

The suggestion was made that our Catholic weeklies ought to run a column of criticism of past TV programmes and pointers to coming ones.* There was also a call for greater cooperation between RTV and TVB in the interests of the viewing public.

A delegate thought that most of the discussion at the meeting concerned the English channels of the two TV stations, whereas the majority of viewers watch Chinese programmes. This speaker agreed with the suggestion to set up a committee to voice criticism of the programmes, some of which, he considered, were rather scandalous. Constant criticism, he felt, would show the authorities that there is a demand for good—in every sense of the word—TV programmes.

At the end of the meeting a motion to conclude the Group's discussions by Christmas was passed unanimously.

* Good! Any volunteers?—Ed.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Religious	Monday, November 16
Evangelisation	Monday, November 16
Social Mission of Church	Tuesday, November 17
Communications Media	Wednesday, November 18
Ecumenism	Thursday, November 19
Government of Diocese	Friday, November 20

Place: Catholic Centre, Hong Kong

Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.