

Convention News

SOCIAL MISSION OF CHURCH

It will be recalled that this time last year Group 7 found themselves unable to discuss the first 16 pages of their draft document. The decision was then made that these pages were to be rewritten and submitted again to the delegates for discussion. Three of these pages were presented to the Group at their last meeting (March 30). Thirteen delegates attended—a far cry from the one hundred and more delegates that came to the meetings when this same matter was discussed twelve months ago. Even though thirteen delegates do not constitute a quorum, it was agreed nevertheless to go on with the meeting.

Paragraphs 1-4 had been voted on last year and accepted with certain minor modifications. It was now suggested that the remarks in these paragraphs about democratic participation in government should be supplemented. Full democratic participation, it was maintained, might well lead to chaos, but surely there is a middle way between full participation in democratic processes and practically none at all. We should therefore recommend greater responsible participation of the population in areas that are not directly political, such as education, traffic and health.

Another point brought up was that charges are often made of racial inequalities in Hong Kong. Some speakers quoted examples of more favoured treatment accorded to expatriates as regards salary and conditions of employment; they claimed moreover that Europeans dealing with government offices get better and more prompt service. It was decided that the wording of the draft at this point should be improved to bring out what exactly we mean by racial discrimination. We should admit that it exists and not brush it aside as a piece of political propaganda.

There was much discussion regarding a suitable Chinese equivalent for the term *lack of identity*. A number of possibilities were proposed, but it was found impossible to reach agreement. The choice of the most suitable term was finally left to the redrafting committee. Whatever about the word used (there was also some discussion whether perhaps a *sense of belonging* would be more accurate in the English version), all agreed that the problem of a lack of a sense of identity on the part of young people in Hong Kong is a very real one. Some delegates who had been abroad for studies recalled how embarrassing it was to be asked where they came from. They added that young people from Singapore, whatever their racial background, have no hesitation in calling themselves Singaporeans.

Some time was also spent debating whether the chapter should be called *Socio-Political Background* instead of *Political Situation*. A new subtitle was also proposed: *Problems of Social Consciousness*. To fit in with this subtitle it was also suggested that the paragraph headings be changed to *Problem of Colonial Status, Problem of Identity, Problem of Insecurity*. A further suggestion was to insert between the chapter heading and the subtitle a few sentences on "the good things of Hong Kong," e.g. an acknowledgment that here we enjoy freedom of religion, a very

great measure of personal freedom, liberty to choose the type of schooling one wishes for one's children.

One delegate warned against the danger of an excessive watering down of the language of the original draft. It would be a pity, it was said, if our document were to be ruthlessly emasculated to satisfy older people and if consequently we finished up with a text that says nothing to youth and very little about the real problems they are faced with. We should remember that in many places the papal encyclicals use strong and energetic language. We should not be afraid of following suit.

EDUCATION

GROUP 3 held their final meeting on March 31 in Caritas House, Kowloon, to discuss the recommendations which follow the chapter on Staff and Administration.

A question held over from the previous meeting was first discussed: how should the recommendation urging that "teachers of all Catholic schools should be paid the same salaries as their counterparts in Government schools" be worded? There was agreement that it should be addressed to Government; that it should not be confined to teachers in Catholic schools, but should include those in all non-profit-making schools; and that it should extend also to equality in fringe benefits. One delegate stated that our aim should be to stress the dignity of every child and his potential for development: from this it should follow that there ought to be as little difference as possible in the quality of education available to children; we should be ready to do anything we can to see that this becomes a reality. But who should press Government to improve the conditions of all private-assisted school teachers? It was felt that to ask the Catholic Education Council to do so would be to take too narrow a view. As no agreement on this point seemed forthcoming the Group moved on, leaving the problem unsolved.

"Contracts should be automatically renewed after a probationary period of two years." The first speaker strongly opposed this recommendation. He felt that details of internal administration such as this should be left for each school principal to work out. Another speaker said we should stress the need for giving teachers a sense of security without necessarily spelling out the details of how this should be done. A third speaker asserted that some Catholic institutions have a bad name for arbitrary dismissals, especially of minor staff. It was also alleged that some Catholic schools do not draw up a proper contract with their teachers. A delegate expressed his surprise at hearing this, since he thought that teachers were adequately protected by the Education Code and could appeal to the ED over unjust treatment.

A nun pointed out that while it is only right to insist that schools have proper contracts and not dismiss teachers arbitrarily, this is only half the story. What about teachers who arbitrarily break the terms of their contract and leave their job without consideration for the impossible position in which this places the school? she asked. Another delegate stated

that he had received recently letters from 5 principals appealing for help: they had been left in a very awkward position at this critical time of the school year through teachers giving notice and leaving for better jobs or for foreign parts. The Government was not blameless in this, it was alleged; on the one hand the ED will do nothing to help a school to keep a teacher, and on the other Government departments will take teachers away from schools without any regard for the time of the year or the proximity of exams.

After a lengthy discussion of these and other considerations there seemed fairly wide agreement that our recommendation should contain the following four points: all personnel serving the school should be under a properly drawn up contract; they should be protected from arbitrary dismissal; they should enjoy a reasonable sense of security in the renewal of their contract; teachers themselves should adhere faithfully to the terms of their contracts. The final wording of the proposal was left to the redrafting committee.

Should Catholic teachers in Hong Kong form a teachers' union? A delegate remarked that this suggestion is frequently brought up at meetings of the CEC and a number of objections are just as frequently urged against it; for instance, a) such an organization would seriously undermine the HK Teachers Association (the only one recognised by Government); b) the difficulty in deciding who would be eligible for membership of a Catholic teachers' union: would it be just Catholic teachers in Catholic schools? or also Catholic teachers in non-Catholic schools? and then what about non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools?

In spite of these difficulties some delegates spoke in favour of a Catholic Teachers Association: many other countries have one; other professions have their Catholic professional organization; it would fulfil the useful purpose of promoting ideals of better education in the community. Others however considered it would be a retrograde step after Vatican II to start a Catholic association when a general one of the same kind already exists. As an alternative they proposed that we should strongly urge all Catholic teachers to participate more actively in the HKTA. The result of a vote on whether to recommend the formation of a Catholic teachers association was inconclusive in view of the large number of delegates who abstained from voting. It was therefore decided to include this recommendation among those submitted to the full assembly of delegates.

By this time it was past 10 o'clock. It was decided nevertheless to continue the meeting and deal with the remaining three recommendations. The first of these, urging the setting up of an arbitration board to resolve personnel problems in Catholic schools, was accepted. A second proposing that "a school committee in charge of day-to-day routine should be established with the principal and elected teachers" was rejected since it seemed already contained in the proposed school advisory council. The final re-

commendation advocates some form of pension scheme for the clerical and minor staff of schools. To this recommendation it was decided to add two other points: clerical and minor staff should also be under contract and a provident fund should be started for all diocesan employees who do not enjoy the benefit of other welfare funds.

The meeting ended at 10.20 leaving the weary delegates slightly bemused—and rather surprised that finally, against all expectations, they had come to the end of their document.