

# Business Page

## Britain is worried about Hong Kong-1997



Your Business  
**Diane Maley**  
Thomson News Service

The horror and repression in China has prompted calls for western countries to help the people of Hong Kong. The colony will be handed back to China in July, 1997.

Britain, already beset by ethnic strife, is worried about how it can absorb a big share of the 3.5 million Hong Kong residents who hold British passports. Britain "could not easily contemplate a massive new immigration commitment which could more than double the ethnic minority population," Sir Geoffrey Howe, foreign secretary, said recently.

North America would have an easier time absorbing an influx of Hong Kong Chinese, many of whom speak English and are relatively well educated. But while real estate speculators rub their hands at the prospect of another huge inflow of Hong Kong money, the actual economic effects may not be as anticipated. But they will be beneficial.

As to the potential for resentment against the newcomers - so-called "racism" or cultural friction - it is something we in North America have to learn to live with. A million or so new immigrants will not make it any worse.

Newcomers from Hong Kong have been remarkably hard-working and law abiding. Most of all, though, many of the more recent ones have been rich. Canada has been luring immigrants who have at least \$350,000 in their pockets with which to start a new business.

### WEALTH FACTOR

The prospect of many more wealthy settlers is cheering real estate market players, particularly in Toronto and Vancouver. High-flying prices have led some to speculate that the two cities are in for a market collapse.

These hopeful ones may be disappointed. Most of the people with money already have fled Hong Kong and gained a foothold elsewhere. They have already bought their houses, shopping malls and office buildings. They have stashed their money in banks around the world.

What then can we expect from another big influx of immigrants? A more vibrant economy. This will come not from the capital inflow

but from the big increase in workers, earners and hence spenders. The population base, and so the economy, will be expanded.

The economy could also take on a new vibrancy, thanks to the incredible entrepreneurial spirit of the Hong Kong people. New businesses will start up and not fail because they are backed by sufficient capital. New jobs will be created, new taxes collected.

There will be problems. Sleepy Canada, with its laid-back attitude and unionized workforce, could be in for a shakeup. In Australia, the huge inflow of Hong Kong and Japanese entrepreneurs is straining existing companies, which find it hard to compete with the newcomers.

Many in Canada will not welcome the change.

If it happens, this infusion of unbridled capitalism may force us to think seriously about something we have been avoiding for a long time: is cut-throat competition in the marketplace worth the cheap goods it brings us? Do we need all those goods anyway?

Surely, capitalism and moderation need not be opposites.

### Resident wants range closed

A Georgetown man, tired of dodging golf balls while he sits in his yard, asked Halton Hills to close down a driving range owned by the North Halton Golf and Country Club.

Robert Harris of Maple Avenue said his house is "in range of every ball" from the golf course. His windows have been broken by flying golf balls over the last seven years, he said.

But the town said Monday night that it is not within its jurisdiction to close down the private facility. No action can be taken until the town files a report and consults with a lawyer. Town councillors voted to receive Mr. Harris' complaint "for information."

## Ellis-Don hints at legal action over rejected tender

Halton Region rejected a late tender bid by SkyDome builders Ellis-Don Limited last week, although the company's lawyer said the Region could face a legal battle.

Halton shortlisted three companies to vie for the chance to build a \$30 million expansion to the Regional municipal buildings on Highway 25 in Oakville. The proposal was due June 6 at 2 p.m.

But Ellis-Don lawyer John Judson told Regional councillors last Wednesday that through a series of minor errors, Ellis-Don representative Randal Froebelius, who arrived at the Regional building by 2 p.m., didn't have the proposal stamped until 2:05. At 2:15 p.m., Mr. Froebelius was told by Regional staff that the Ellis-Don proposal would not be accepted because it was late.

Ellis-Don did not "ask the Region to forgive us for the fact that we were running on very short time" but said they wanted to compete with Cooper Construction and Jackson-Lewis Company Limited.

The Region, said Mr. Judson, granted Jackson-Lewis a shot at the expansion proposal although the company's tender form was not sealed.

"The Region exercised its

discretion to waive that formality. It would be unfair and unequitable for the Region to distinguish between the informal Jackson-Lewis tender and the informal Ellis-Don tender."

Regional councillors and staff asked reporters, the public and Ellis-Don officials to leave the chambers while they discussed the Ellis-Don tender for the next hour.

All councillors but Janet Mitchell of Oakville voted to refuse the Dome-builder's tender. Coun. Mitchell said June 7 at the administration and finance meeting, where all three bidding companies spoke, that she would like at least three bids for a fair competition.

Oakville Coun. Liz Behrens questioned Ellis-Don's lawyer for several minutes, asking him why the company couldn't phone the Region to ask where the proposal should be put.

Regional Chairman Peter Pomeroy said the Region was being fair to Ellis-Don, and had allowed the lawyer representing the company to speak over the 10-minute delegation limit. Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale said she made her decision two weeks ago when the executive director of the Ont-

ario General Contractor's Association said the late proposal should be rejected.

In the hallway outside the council chambers last Wednesday, Ellis-Don's lawyer said he would have to consult with his client before commenting on whether or not there would be legal action.

But earlier, to Regional councillors, Mr. Judson said the Region must pit the advantages of looking at Ellis-Don's \$100,000 proposal "against the risks of litigation."

Mr. Judson said it should be one of the Region's "fears" to "expose the public and the taxpayers" to litigation.

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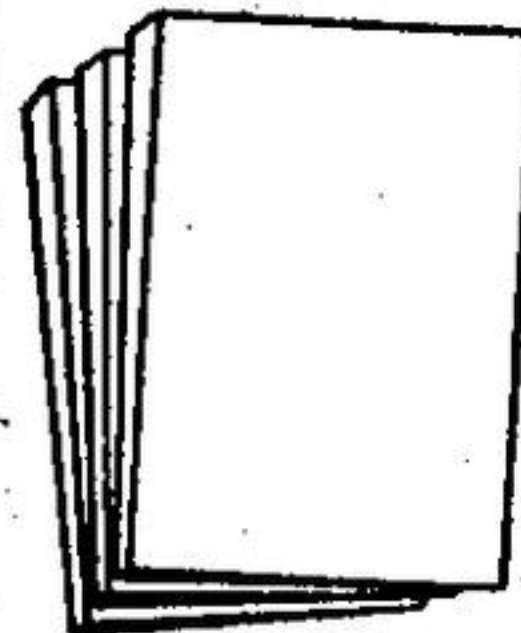
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