

Another conference. Who needs them (especially at Darling Harbour when you are trying to scratch out a meagre existence up the road in Phillip Street)?

But Hong Kong...? Pearl of the Orient - residence of 6 million very edgy Chinese, 60,000 Vietnamese emigres and (very) assorted others - and shoppers' paradise (but only up to \$400 per Australian adult if you want to bring it home).

The Law Association for Asia and the Pacific met again. Countries represented - 20 (including United Kingdom, Switzerland and Italy??). Delegates - 375 odd (some more than others). Australians - 127. Sydney bench - 5. Sydney bar - 6.

The event was held in the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai which, judging by the hammering and drilling which accompanied most sessions, was still under construction. It was overshadowed by a convention of jewelers and watchmakers secured by guards armed with shotguns. And there is something disconcerting about signs saying: "When there is a fire, do not use lifts". (What happened to "if"?)

Anyway, after the usual frenzy of exchange of cards we got down to business.

To save you a lengthy and boring rapportage (that will be produced in due course by the organisers), here is an incomplete selection of messages exchanged at the various sessions:

Insolvency - often follows the subject of the next session.

Taxation - inevitable. Less painful if you live in Hong Kong (at least until 1997).

Communication and Media Law - a fund of information about leasing and insuring satellites, the Cape York Spaceport, contempt of court and defamation.

Administrative Law - whither Crown immunity? (Perhaps to China); judicial review (is it out of hand? Give the bureaucracy back to the shiny-buns.) Where did they get this doctrine of a stay of proceedings anyway? Who makes the decisions around here?

Human Rights - the practical problems of demonstrating to Nepalese villagers and Bombay stevedores that:
(a) they have them; and
(b) they should exercise them.

Followed by a whip-around at dinner to fund the human rights program for the next two years (not tax-deductible, yet).

Constitutions in a Modern Setting - think of a topic, it's there. Hong Kong's future and the basic law; independence of the judiciary and its violation in Asia, the Pacific and Australia (yes, I know Mr. Staples was not a member of a court established under s.71 of the Constitution, but he was given the rights, title and immunities of a judge). Anyway, what do you do with a miscreant judge? Obtain on appointment (as did Marcos) a signed, undated letter of resignation?

Complex Commercial Crime - we need computers to detect, combat and prosecute international wrongdoing: but somebody has to drive them. More

power to the state - 1984 has been and gone. Excesses of official zeal can be compensated by damages. Search warrants? Bah, humbug! And as for "dishonesty" - well, it's a bit like the elephant's bottom: difficult to define but you know it when you smell it (according to Perth barrister, Andrew Hodge).

Intellectual Property - eh?

Environmental Law - is anyone listening? Perhaps ICAC has a role. Nobody else seems to be doing much. Oh well, if we keep going as we are, there soon won't be anything left to protect.

Regulation of Capital and Money Markets - less is better. Where do you get it? How to move it.

Women and the Law - lunch by invitation only.

The Legal Profession - computers (again); insurance; confidentiality and its overlap with that of bankers.

Judicial Section - ?

Commercial Arbitration - yes, Sir Laurence attended.

Court Delays - we all know how to end them - all we need is a government with the will and the money. (Looks like we'll be battling for some time to come.) Hong Kong does not seem to have a problem: plenty of judges there (at least until 1997).

(I have most papers available for copying.)

If you are still with me, let me tell you about the gala dinner, a confusing order of execrable dishes finishing with "petits fours chinois", replete with jugglers who dropped their balls and a songstress who cleared the restaurant in the space of 2.5 songs. Amazing. Even the tables left.

The Hong Kong Law Society President took every opportunity to interrupt proceedings - some sort of microphone fetish. The President of the Bar did a Wheelahan - overlooked at the opening ceremony he entertained (?) us at lunch with the speech he would have delivered if asked.

Seriously, though, there were lessons to be learned. Lawyers in the region do look to Australia for guidance and support. Our tradition and its maintenance are admired and sought to be emulated. We have an influence largely unrecognised at home. We can learn from them, too - not only what to avoid, but how to broaden constructively our sometimes blinkered and often inwardly directed vision.

The next conference is in Perth in two years' time. It is expected 700-800 will attend (Australia attracts larger numbers from the region). See if you can make it.

And ponder this: if a feng shui man (a geomancer) had been consulted in time, Frederick Jordan Chambers might have been passed over by Counsel's Chambers Ltd. See? We can learn from the north. But perhaps it's not too late for a bit of bai sun. Let's face it, the spirits which dwell at 233 Macquarie Street need to be placated.

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