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PS/ME LUCE
ME DONALD
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TELEGRAM NUMBER 363 OF 2/3/84

INFO IMMEDIATE HONG KONG

FUTURE OF HONG KONG: CHINESE PRESS COMMENT

1. PEOPLE'S DAILY OF 2 MARCH CARRIES A XINHUA REPORT, DATED HONG KONG 1 MARCH, WHICH IS ENTITLED "HONG KONG OPINION POINTS OUT: THIS IS A REPLAY OF THE OLD TUNE OF THE "THREE-LEGGED STOOL".

2. THE REPORT RECORDS THE TABLING OF MR LOBO'S MOTION ON 24 FEBRUARY AND THE WELCOME WHICH IT WAS GIVEN BY A SPOKESMAN OF THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT ON THE AFTERNOON OF THE SAME DAY. IT STATES THAT, AT A RECEPTION ON 27 FEBRUARY, MR LUCE SAID THAT AN AGREEMENT ON HONG KONG'S FUTURE WOULD BE PRESENTED FOR DEBATE BY THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT AND BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BEFORE A FINAL DECISION WAS REACHED. ON 28 FEBRUARY, HE SAID AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD TAKEN NO DECISION ON HOW TO TEST LOCAL VIEWS ON THE HONG KONG QUESTION, BUT THAT A REFERENDUM COULD PERHAPS BE HELD.

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3. BY SUDDENLY PROPOSING THE MOTION WHILE THE TALKS WERE IN PROGRESS, MR LOBO HAD RAISED SIDE ISSUES AND AROUSED CONCERN AMONG PEOPLE IN HONG KONG. SOME NEWSPAPERS HAD POINTED

OUT THAT THE DAY BEFORE THE MOTION WAS TABLE, MICHAEL BROWN, A CONSERVATIVE MP, HAD TABLED HIS EARLY-DAY MOTION IN PARLIAMENT. THIS "COINCIDENCE OF VIEWS WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION" MADE PEOPLE SUSPECT A REPLAY OF THE PUBLIC OPINION CARD AND THE OLD TUNE OF THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL.

4. THE ARTICLE THEN QUOTES HUANG MENGHUA, AN URBAN COUNCILLOR, AS SAYING THAT LEGCO COULD NOT CLAIM TO REPRESENT THE WILL OF HONG KONG PEOPLE SINCE ITS MEMBERS WERE APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR RATHER THAN ELECTED. MUN KIN-CHOK OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE TALKS ARE BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS AND SHOULD NOT BE RESTRICTED BY LEGCO, A BODY WHICH SHOULD HAVE NO INFLUENCE OVER THE AGREEMENT. IF LEGCO WERE TO PLAY A ROLE IN THE TALKS, THIS COULD TURN THEM INTO A THREE-LEGGED STOOL, SOMETHING PEKING HAD OPPOSED FROM THE OUTSET. OTHERS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE POINTED OUT THAT THE TWO SIDES HAD AGREED TO KEEP THE CONTENTS OF THE TALKS SECRET. IF THE LEGCO MOTION WERE NOW TO BE APPROVED, IT WOULD VIOLATE THIS AGREEMENT AND HARM THE GOOD ATMOSPHERE OF THE TALKS. ITS OUTCOME COULD ONLY BE CHAOS AND RENEWED SOCIAL UNREST AFFECTING HONG KONG'S STABILITY AND PROSPERITY. THEY HOPED THAT THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT AND THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES WOULD HANDLE THIS MATTER WISELY.

COMMENT

5. THE ARTICLE IS REASONABLY LOW-KEY. IT DOES NOT EXPLICITLY CALL FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE MOTION OR THE CANCELLATION OF THE DEBATE AND IS THUS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT ZHOU NAN SAID TO ME YESTERDAY (MY TEL NO 358). BUT THERE COULD BE MORE PUBLIC COMMENT TO COME.

EVANS