

Chinese Water Supply Vital to Hong Kong

By ARTHUR J. DOMMEN
United Press International
Hong Kong—The Chinese Reds could take over this tiny British outpost with ease, either by armed force or simply by cutting off the water supply.

Hong Kong, which flaunts skyscraper hotels, swank country clubs and a vast industrial complex, gets about five billion gallons of water a year from China, and the Reds can turn off the faucet any time they choose.

But no one here is worried. There is virtually no fear on the part of government officials or private citizens that China will make that strategic move, although all agree the colony would be easy pickings if it did.

Why is Hong Kong so safe, while other less desirable pieces of real estate are eyed covetously by the Communist Chinese?

Shortage Has Passed

The critical water shortage is Hong Kong's jugular vein and the mid-summer madness which saw thousands of barely clothed people running into the streets with bars of

soap in their hands at the slightest sign of a rain shower has passed.

But the critical shortage of fresh water which caused the crisis is not over. And in the opinion of most realistic government officials, it will not end in the foreseeable future.

Hong Kong, which paradoxically consists mainly of beautiful islands surrounded by lapping waves and thin peninsulas stretching their arms into languid blue and green waters, has a population whose natural expansion races ahead of engineers' frantic schemes for preserving precious rainfall.

Fight Losing Battle

The engineers have been fighting a losing battle since 1859, when the governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, offered a reward for the design of a workable water supply system.

The winning plan provided for a small impounding reservoir in the Pokfulam valley on the south side of Hong Kong island, from which an open conduit led to the center of the business district. Ca-

capacity of this first reservoir was 66 million gallons—less than Hong Kong's 3.5 million residents consume in an average summer day today.

The trouble is that Hong Kong depends on rainfall for all its water. It is necessary to conserve the run-off from the wet season (April to September) in sufficient man-made storage reservoirs to last during the dry season (October to March).

No Permeable Strata

Nowhere in the British colony is there a large area of permeable strata which could be used as a natural storage basin underground.

There is strict rationing of water in Hong Kong. Residents currently only receive water pressure in their taps for four hours every fourth day. There has been a mass campaign aimed at eliminating water wastage, and the Hong Kong government this summer managed to reduce the total per capita consumption.

Still, even with rationing, consumption is running about 40 million gallons of water per day, compared with a

peak of 93 million gallons at the same time last year when there was a daily 8-hour supply in effect. The last summer there was a round-the-clock supply of water was in 1957.

At the height of this summer's crisis, authorities began prosecuting persons caught washing automobile or watering their rose beds. Ten large tankers were hired to ferry water from the mouth of the nearby Pearl river flowing down from the South China city of Canton.

Two Major Projects

Within the colony itself, there are at least two major projects to increase the total reservoir capacity from its present 10½ billion gallons.

The first is a land reservoir on the virtually uninhabited island of Lantau, and the second calls for creating a sea-level reservoir by shutting off a cove in the nearby New Territories by constructing a dam. The sea-level reservoir, which will not be in operation before 1972, will have a total capacity of 30 billion gallons per day through a complicated system of pipelines, some of them under the sea.

The most famous pipeline in the colony at this date,

however, is the one which brings water into the New Territories from across the Red Chinese border.

Purchase Water

Under an agreement with the Reds, Hong Kong purchases five billion gallons per year from the mainland Shumchun reservoir, paying 23.4 Hong Kong cents (about four U.S. cents) per thousand gallons. The water was originally offered free of charge. But the British, spotting an invitation to the exercise of political pressure at some future date, insisted on contracting for the sale, rather than for the gift, of the water.

The recent crisis led the Hong Kong government to explore the possibility of extending the Shumchun pipeline from its source in China a further 45 miles to the west, where it could capture fresh water from the East riv-

er. The Communists are reported to be still considering this idea, which would add another 20 million gallons per day to the colony's water supplies.

Other Schemes

Other water-producing schemes are further off. Hong Kong has had nuclear distillation schemes under study since 1958, but they have been too costly.

The crisis over water supplies has once again raised the old question of Communist China's leverage over this tiny foreign enclave which China probably could capture without firing a shot.

But old Hong Kong hands know what value a free Hong Kong holds for Red China, in terms of hard dollars and cents in trade and in terms of access to the great outside world, especially in view of Peking's quarrel with its

Russian neighbors.

For this reason, authorities here have no compunction about increasingly drawing their water supplies from that vast hinterland which lies on the other side of the Bamboo curtain.

As long as Communist China remains out of the United Nations and has such limited relations with the other nations of the world, Hong Kong has much more value as a doorway to the West than it would ever have as just another city in China.

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Thornton May Sue For Federal Funds

Salem—UPI—The federal government has withheld more than \$30,000 from three Oregon state agencies and Atty. Gen. Robert Y. Thornton said his staff is considering going to the U. S. Court of Claims to try to get it.

Because of a dispute over state gasoline tax rebates the federal government claims it is owed, the U. S. general accounting office has withheld payment of more than \$23,000 to the Oregon Fish commission, nearly \$6,000 from the Oregon Game commission and about \$1,500 from the State Highway commission.



CARRIES WATER—Against a backdrop of luxury apartment houses, a girl, member of a squatter family living in a hillside hut, carries water in cans up a narrow path to her home in Hong Kong. (UPI)

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