

Bulletin

181st Beijing Fellowship Group Meeting of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Tuesday, 18th January 2000, 12:30 China World Hotel, Beijing.

Chairman Peter Finamore opened the 181st Fellowship Meeting of Rotarians in Beijing by welcoming visiting Rtn Jürgen Grüneberg from the RC of Erwitte-Hellweg, Germany and Rtn Vicki McGregor from the RC of Hampton, Australia as well as fourteen guests. Chairman Peter extended a special welcome to H.E. Ambassador Richard Smith of Australia, our speaker for today.

Reports/Announcements

- Chairman Peter Finamore announced that the annual District Governor's letter has arrived and will be circulated to all members.
- Chairman Peter also reported that there will be a Presidential Conference in Hong Kong (open to all Rotarians) to be held in the Regent Hotel and all interested Rotarians should advise the Chairman after the meeting. All members of the BFG are encouraged to attend this meeting if at all possible.
- Rtn Peter Finamore reminded all present that the invoices for dues are on their way and that payment should be made by telegraphic transfer with a clear reference there would be a meeting during the Spring Festival on February 8th.
- There was a visit by the district 3450 leadership last week and several of our Committee members had an opportunity to have fruitful discussions with the DG and other delegates.
- Rtn Peter announced that Rtn Tan Loong Keat is working on a submission to the RC Hong Kong web site.
- Rtn Peter Crowhurst reported on the various projects of his Community Service Committee including the Qinghai Tent School Project (for which approval from the RC of Hong Kong is now being applied for) and the PC Project. He also invited anyone interested to attend the next committee meeting on the 26th at the Kempinski Hotel. Rtn Peter also invited interested members to join and take over the International Service. Our Chairman took this opportunity to thank all the Rotarians involved in the various projects, in particular in the ambulance project: The ambulances, which could not be imported to China due to the fact that they had been used, were returned to Canada to be sold there and the money would be transferred to us to buy ambulances made here in China.

Address

Rtn Loong Keat introduced the speaker, Richard Smith, ambassador of Australia whom he had known well for some time. Ambassador Smith had been awarded the Officer of the

Order of Australia on the Queen's honours list in 1998, one of the highest decorations in Australia. Ambassador Smith told a story of having been a member of the RC of Honolulu and meetings attended by Rotarians wearing Aloha shirts in a wonderfully warm and casual atmosphere. He started out by explaining that to him working in China seemed like taking a four-year-long IQ test without ever being told the result! On reflection he found that initially China seemed to get more than Australia did in all the negotiations that were taking place between the two countries. However, this apparent imbalance was offset in later years so that in retrospect, the relationship between the two nations has found a good balance of advantages and benefits for both sides. Diplomatic, trade and defence relationships have all improved over the four years that ambassador Smith has served in Beijing. Over the years, the position of the PLA and its direct involvement has changed somewhat to a back-stage position and relations on the defence side have also improved as the PLA has opened up and become more accessible over the years. One problem remaining is the illegal immigrants, but China apparently has started stopping boats leaving China's coast so that the actual arrival rate of illegal immigrants has decreased. The so called non-compliance with visa regulations (overstay etc.) has decreased over the years and was about 13% out of some 77,000 visas granted to Chinese last year. The ambassador closed his address by saying that the outlook for China's continued growth is positive especially after the new opening push in economic reform initiated by premier Zhu in 1998. The ambassador thinks that China's economic policy is sound and that the role of the government is actually being reduced with a new emphasis on private enterprise and entrepreneurship. (Editor's note: In 1998 the constitution was amended and one of the three important amendments was that the private sector would be given equal status and importance to the public sector in China's future economic development.) The ambassador sees no devaluation of the RMB and has maintained this position for over two years already: There just is no reason for China to devalue its currency. Problems will remain during transition from the planned to the market economy, one being increasing unemployment, but ambassador Smith was confident that the government can handle them. The Chinese now have more choices and better education than ever before and the future looks bright. Rtn Chris Bramsen thanked the ambassador and said that ambassador Smith's presentation made him proud and happy to be an ambassador himself.

On the lighter side.....

The stockbroker received notice from the IRS that he was being audited. He showed up at the appointed time and place with all his financial records, then sat for what seemed like hours as the accountant pored over them.

Finally the IRS agent looked up and commented, "You must have been a tremendous fan of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle."

"Why would you say that?" wondered the broker.

"Because you've made more brilliant deductions on your last three returns than Sherlock Holmes made in his entire career."