

15

Wealth or Welfare?

A LEGISLATIVE COUNCILLOR recently blamed some wealthy people for competing with each other to see who had most money. He suggested that they should devote themselves to charitable work instead. I agree with that Councillor. In fact, helping those in need brings happiness to both the giver and the receiver.

I am reminded of an amusing experience once when I had been invited to speak at a meeting. The organizer of the meeting had arranged for a car to take me to the meeting place. Imagine my shock when a huge pink Rolls Royce arrived at my home to convey me to the meeting! At that time I was living and working among poor people, and when I travelled in that car I felt like “Cinderella at a Ball”. I actually felt embarrassed to be travelling in such luxury, and tried to keep out of view of the poor people. I have never understood why some feel proud to be rich while others starve. Of course, I know there are some rich people who help the poor.

On another occasion, a wealthy merchant was appointed to the Urban Council, of which I was an elected member. To go on duty to my office to listen to people’s complaints, I used to take a bus from Mongkok to Wong Tai Sin, and then walk to the office. The new member was my partner on duty, and he kindly offered to pick me up and take me to the office in his

car. I accepted his offer. An English press reporter apparently saw me getting into the car, and wrote an unkind article in the newspaper. She claimed that I “pretended” to be poor, but she had seen me leaving home in a fine car with a well-dressed chauffeur. My fellow-Councillor was greatly amused that he had been called my “chauffeur”. He was one of the richest men in Hong Kong, and, in this case, my benefactor.

As to the Legislative Councillor’s criticism mentioned at the beginning, I have a suggestion to make. Wealthy people, instead of competing with each other to find out who is the wealthiest, could organise another kind of competition? They could compete to find out which of them is the fairest and most generous employer. After all, some employers do become wealthy by overworking and underpaying their workers. They would gain more respect as well as personal enjoyment from winning a “Workers’ Welfare Competition”.