

100 feel first blow of EEC textile axe

Henry King Standard

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MORE than 100 Tsunwan workers yesterday became the first known victims of the recent cutbacks in textile export quotas to the Common Market.

The workers turned up at their Castle Peak Road factory early yesterday only to find the doors closed.

The workers then staged a protest outside the factory demanding to meet the manager to question him about the sudden closure. They also demanded their salaries as yesterday was supposed to have been their pay day.

When their requests were not met, the workers put up posters on the factory walls condemning the management and accusing the factory of making them jobless.

However, the workers quietened down when officers from the Labour Department called at the factory and promised to make arrangements for their representatives to

meet the management.

The workers were also asked to start work today at 10 am. The workers normally start work at 9 am.

A representative of the management told newsmen later that the company forced to cut down on their products because of the recent cut-backs in export quotas.

He said the management had informed the workers that they were now only required to work only every other day and that there would not be over-time work.

The management also cancelled its medical scheme and other worker benefits.

The workers said they were not happy with the terms offered and demanded immediate reinstatement of all worker benefits plus an assurance that no worker will be sacked.

They also proposed shorter working shifts so that all workers could work everyday instead of every other day.

To many others, the quotas mean fear

FIFTY-four-year-old Mrs Sin probably does not know what is meant by the reduction of textile quotas but she is concerned about what is going to happen to her if she loses her job.

Her reaction is typical of many textile workers who yesterday told of their fears following the new agreement on textile quotas.

"I have been in the knitting factory for nine years. It will be difficult for me to learn a new trade," said Mrs Sin, who works in the Shun On Knitting and Garment Factory in Cheungshawan, which has about 200 workers.

"I don't know how am I going to make a living if I lose my job," she said while putting the final touches to a knitted-shirt, a trade she took up some 20 years ago.

For the younger workers of the factory, the picture is so gloomy. Many of them pointed out they could find jobs in other factories which are not so hard hit

by the reductions.

"I can work in a weaving factory," said a girl who joined the factory nine months ago and has been working the textile trade for three years.

The new agreements will probably result in as many as 10,000 workers losing their jobs.

The new quotas cut cotton fabrics back by 6,000 pieces, or 32 per cent. The quota for trousers and jeans has been reduced by some 7.8 million pairs, or 14 per cent. Limited growth rates have been set for future exports.

However some textile companies said yesterday that they were not yet sure how the new quota would effect their operations. They said they were waiting for a full explanation of the situation from the Department of Trade Industry and Customs later this week.

One factory owner, Mr Wong Chung-hon, said the

initial quota announced last week would not affect his factory too much as they concentrated on knitted T-shirts and blouses.

But Mr Wong, like a number of other factory proprietors, was still uncertain about the future.

The Department of Trade Industry and Customs is understood to have asked factories for details of last year's exports to arrive at final figures of reduced export items.

Mr Wong said if the initial figures were indicative of what was going to happen to the textile exports in the next five years, the only way for them to survive would be to concentrate on producing more sophisticated products and to find new markets.

The new agreement is believed to have hit small factories worst as they are not equipped with sufficient facilities and manpower to

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produce high-quality products.

Some managers of textile companies said they might consider exporting some of their products to the EEC through their Macao contacts if the new agreement is as harsh as first reports have indicated.

Other garment manufacturers are known to have already set up factories in Macao to give finishing touches to products made in Hongkong to be exported on Macao quotas.

One manufacturer accused the British

Government of not fighting for Hongkong to obtain a better deal he said the new agreement would probably reduce 30-40 per cent of his company's production.

The Manager of Resultants Brothers Co Mr Tang said that it would be even more difficult to do business with European countries which accounted for some 60 to 70 per cent of their production.

"But at this stage we don't know anything definite until the government supply us with details of the new agreement," said Mr Tang.

Mr Chan Kai-hon, manager of Apollo Textiles,

which is specialised in producing wide-width cotton fabrics like bedclothes, said the new agreement would not hit his factory very hard as his production was concentrated outside the four sensitive items earmarked for the harshest cut backs.

But he said the new agreement would indirectly hit his company as his company supplies cotton fabrics to garment factories which would be affected by the new agreement.

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