

## *Government accused of bowing to business pressure*

# Age discrimination 'cave-in'

By Lucia Palpal-latoc

**T**HE government was accused yesterday of bowing to pressure from the business sector when it announced its decision not to introduce a law against age discrimination.

Secretary for Education and Manpower Joseph Wong Wing-ping said the government would spend \$2 million a year on an education campaign instead of introducing legislation.

But his admission that fears of increasing costs for businesses had influenced the government's decision drew fire from legislators.

The plan had been scrapped, he said, after a consultation in June on proposed legislation met a muted response.

"The relatively low response suggests that age discrimination in employment is not of pressing concern," he said.

But he added: "(Legislation) could also hinder the free play of market forces, impose artificial rigidity on employers' operations and add to the cost of doing business. Overseas experience suggests that these legal and

economic factors would not act in the best interests of employees."

Independent legislator and chief executive of the Confederation of Trade Unions Lee Cheuk-yan said he was disappointed with the decision.

"The government has again bowed to pressure from the business sector," he said.

"The government's purpose is to help businessmen get away with age discrimination. It has totally disregarded the voice of the people."

Fellow independent legislator and trade unionist, Leung Yiu-chung, agreed: "The government appears to be more concerned about the business sector than the welfare of workers."

Liberal Party legislator and chairman of the General Chamber of Commerce, James Tien Pei-chun, recently said pro-labour laws had lifted business costs 15 per cent.

Democratic Party legislator John Tse Wing-ling said his party would step up lobbying in the Legislative Council for the passage of a private member's bill banning age discrimination, to be introduced by Democrat Lau Chi-shek.