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'BACKDATE COMPENSATION LAW'

Accident victims petition Govt

MORE than 200 industrial accident victims, their survivors and labour union representatives petitioned Government House yesterday morning.

They said they wanted to reverse a Government decision to introduce on November 1 the New Employees' Compensation Law passed on July 9 and demanded that the law be back-

dated to cover victims of all accidents that have occurred since January 1, 1979.

The law, they said, should be enacted immediately because hundreds of victims and their families need relief.

The petitioners demanded that Government spare no effort to reduce the number of industrial accidents at construction sites and factories.

The petition move was led by the director of the Christian Industrial Committee Lau Chin-shek.

Mr Lau said that each year one worker in every 800 is killed in an

industrial accident, and one in every four injured, on average.

The new compensation rates are \$168,000 and \$192,000 for death and permanent incapacity respectively, compared to the old rates of \$60,000 and \$80,000.

"It's totally unfair if present victims are paid with the old rates," Mr Lau said.

The petition letter said of the victims: "Many are still awaiting trial in court. In one case, a widow and her only child got \$60,000 in compensation, payable \$3,000 each month. They can rely on that for 20 months. But what happens after that?"

"The old rates were set in 1974. The petty sums offered indicate that the Government did not care about workers' lives. Workers suffered great losses as a Government-appointed working party finished the review on the old law at the end of 1978, yet they will not be covered by the new law which will only take effect on November 1."

The letter presented five demands:-

- Extend immediate relief to victims of accidents which have occurred since January 1, 1979.

- Speed up compensation by setting up a labour tribunal to handle any labour dispute involving compensation.

- Set up an industrial accident emergency relief fund for the victims and their survivors.

- Shorten and simplify compensation claiming procedures to alleviate extra burdens on victims and their survivors.

- Review present laws and impose heavier penalties on persistent violators of safety laws.