

# 1995 a year of spiralling labour rows

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**T**he Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) said yesterday that the number of labour disputes it handled increased 32.5 per cent during a gloomy 1995 and the amount of money involved increased 25.4 per cent.

Leung Fu-wah, a vice-chairman of the FTU, said 6,649 workers were involved in the 636 disputes, which was a 32 per cent increase from the previous year.

He said workers claimed back about 60 per cent of the \$255.7m disputed.

The federation received 14,640 enquiries and complaints last year, a 35.5 per cent increase compared with 1994, and follow-up action was needed in more than 200 cases.

Leung asked workers to join forces against employers' exploitation.

He said about half of the disputes handled by the FTU were related to severance and long-service payments, and 30 per cent of the enquiries and complaints also concerned these issues.

Leung said the number of labour disputes in manufacturing industries rose from 274 to 333, and amounted to more than half the disputes the federation handled.

However, the amount of money claimed in these industries decreased a little, he said.

Leung said it was because most long-serving employees had been dismissed in 1994 before new legislation was enforced to raise their severance and long-service payments.

He predicted many workers under 45 who had more than five years in the same company would be dismissed before proposed legislation to improve their severance and long-service

payments could be passed this year.

The number of labour disputes in service industries handled by the federation rapidly increased from 135 to 196 and the money involved jumped by one-third to \$44m. Leung attributed this to the weak purchasing power arising from the poor economic situation.

Leung said many employers also took advantage of the economic slump to force employees to accept longer working hours, lower wages and poorer benefits.

He said the FTU seldom received complaints about these measures in previous years, but they comprised 10 per cent of the labour disputes last year.

"The management company of a Sha Tin car park asked its security guards to work four hours more a day to reduce staff by one-third, but their monthly salary increased by only \$400," he said.

"A cleaning company serving a Chai Wan housing estate asked its workers to sign new contracts with their monthly salary lowered by \$200 to \$500, or they had to resign."

Facing worsening unemployment, employers could easily recruit new workers, and employees could only accept these unreasonable requests to keep their jobs, he said.

Leung said that in the Chai Wan case, workers sought help from the union and succeeded in forcing the company to withdraw the wage reduction.

"Workers can only resist this unreasonable exploitation by joining forces," he said.

Leung expected more labour disputes in the coming year because there would not be a great improvement in the economic situation and unemployment.