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message to Govt

# 4 worker groups call for more meaningful legislation

A CALL for the reform of Hongkong's labour legislation was made by four worker groups yesterday — the eve of International Labour day.

A statement issued by the groups said that labour legislation was only meaningful when passed for the benefit of workers.

The Government should therefore consult workers before making such laws.

The statement, which also called for May 1 to be made a statutory holiday in Hongkong, was issued by the Taiwohau Federation of Working Youth, the Ecumenical Community, the Saumauping Young Workers' Group and the Kung Kao Po Workers' Group.

Local leftwing organisations are expected to observe International Labour Day quietly today. No large scale celebrations had been planned.

However, some left-wing affiliated workers organisations will be holding their own functions and banquets.

It is reported that even in China celebrations are being kept to a minimum because of a drought affecting the country and a new "nose-to-the-grindstone" policy.

The statement issued by the workers groups yesterday pointed out that Hongkong had 850,000 workers in the manufacturing sector comprising about 45 per cent of the economically active population.

It said that Hongkong's prosperity today was the

direct result of such workers.

It was only fair, therefore, the workers should share in that prosperity, the groups said.

They said they were presenting to the Government a number of suggestions they thought would help improve the working conditions of the average labourer.

They suggested:

- All male industrial and non-industrial workers should not be asked to do more than the internationally accepted eight-hour day and any extra time be paid as overtime.

- Sickness allowance be extended to any worker as long as he has a medical certificate. The existing regulations say that the allowance is only payable after four days of sickness, and on production of a certificate.

- Five of the 10-week maternity leave granted women should be recognised for two-thirds the normal wage.

- Compensation be paid to an injured worker on the first day after he is injured. At present the victims of industrial actions are only entitled to two-thirds of their normal wages three days after the accident.

- A worker should be considered covered by the "employment contractor" after having worked for more than 18 hours a week for four weeks, compared with the present requirement that protection is only given after a worker has worked for the same employer continuously for four weeks on at least three days a week and for not less than six hours a day.

- A worker should be entitled to severance pay as soon as he is covered by the "continuous contract, and that anybody dismissed or asked to resign without sufficient reason be entitled to this payment. At present, workers have to have two full years of employment before they can apply for severance pay.

"We hope that before passing laws, Legislative Councillors will seek feedback and suggestions from the workers or their associations and place the overall welfare of workers as an essential principle for passing such laws, the groups' statement said.

The Government was also urged to enforce labour laws in the spirit in which they were intended.

by  
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