

De Star

10 May, 1978

# 8-hour working day will not bust HK's economy

The following is a letter from Young Workers Centre, Saunaping Federation of Working Youth, Taiwchau Kung Kao Po Workers Group:

**WE** ARE writing to respond to your editorial on May 2 regarding your objections to an eight-hour working day. We find that your reasons for objecting are over-simplified and inadequate.

Your editorial said that the proposal for an eight-hour day for Hongkong workers is the "surest way to bust our economy." We cannot see that this conclusion is supported by facts.

In actuality, an eight-hour day is the normal direction for a society to encourage prosperity. The more prosperous, skilled, and scientific a society becomes,

the more benefit will the workers get from the help of machinery (heavy industry use heavy equipment; light industry use light machinery).

Therefore, as productivity increases, it is no longer necessary to increase man's working hours to increase production.

Increase in working hours may not necessarily increase production, because it could cause workers to be more exhausted and may generate dislike for their work. These (exhaustion and dislike for work) will affect production.

But, with an eight-hour working day, the workers could have adequate rest and energy to cope with the next day's work. This could eventually increase production.

Many developed countries around the world have already recognised this problem and therefore introduced the eight-hour working system. This system did not consequently "bust the (tr) economy" and has not. Your objection,

therefore, seems to go against the direction of development and progress of society.

We propose an eight-hour working daily system but we do not object to workers doing limited overtime work willingly. The prosperity of Hongkong is dependent on us, a diligent and hard-working labour force as stated in your editorial.

But, this prosperity should be shared by us workers. Overtime pay is the employee's reward. We therefore do not know the motivation behind your paper's stand which on the one hand does not regret sacrificing the welfare of ordinary workers and on the other hand unreasonably "agitate" the capitalists to continue oppressing the labour force.

At present, many Hongkong residents do not adequately understand labour unions and not few people in our society (as well as your paper's editorials composer) misunderstand

unions as trouble-makers, disturbing society's stability. Actually, labour unions protect workers and help them promote their rights. When capitalists oppress the workers, labour unions help give the workers a sense of their dignity. (For example, the Jockey Club workers union is a very good example of this.)

Labour unions are a step towards a just and peaceful society. A labour union is organised by its members using a democratic way to manage its concerns unlike what your editorial wants to point out. A healthy union does not control its members; instead its worker-members control the direction of the labour union.

Though we (the organisations behind these proposals) do not belong to any unions, our work includes supporting and educating workers towards organising healthy labour union.

Presently, England has many good strong unions,

but these nevertheless cannot control Britain. If Britain's economy is not strong at present, the onus cannot be entirely be attributed to the workers.

Your paper's oversimplification of the problem which involves a deeper understanding of the economic situation and the unique background of Britain has given the readers a wrong impression.

We strongly oppose your editorial statement because you consider workers as machines (like many people in Hongkong do). We would

like to emphasise that workers are people not machines or mere tools of production. We are proud to contribute to the prosperity of Hongkong but need to share the fruits of this prosperity.

Many people do not recognise or pay attention to giving workers adequate compensation for their work and even rationalise in order to reject workers' suggestions. This only results in the workers being poorer in the end, and causes a small percentage to control the wealth of Hongkong. This is

We are, in fact, hoping that through these seven proposals, we will be able to bring about a reasonable labour legislation in Hongkong and help workers have just working conditions. These, we think, are not "wildly" demands.

a sure way "to bust" a just and peaceful society.

We want to restate that in our proposals on May 1, Labour Day, we had seven points. We hope that we will not be misinterpreted as asking only for an eight-hour working day.

We are, in fact, hoping that through these seven proposals, we will be able to bring about a reasonable labour legislation in Hongkong and help workers have just working conditions. These, we think, are not "wildly" demands.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**