

"A burden...a wise move...a step backward"

1 March 1970 Sunday Post-Herald Magazine

MR RAYMOND FUNG, director of the Hongkong Christian Industrial Committee: "I would like to make three points. Firstly I am pretty suspicious of how quickly and easily the Commissioner of Labour yields to big business. We think this move is obviously a concession to Dr Chung on the eve of the passing of the Employment (Amendment No 2) Bill. Secondly, the idea of women working at night is all right, as long as it is done on a purely voluntary basis. However I suspect that whatever the conditions laid down, some degree of coercion is bound to occur. Finally, our own contacts with young female employees lead us to believe that if they can possibly help it they will not work at night. One reason is that many of them attend evening classes. Therefore our impression is that this move will not attract new female workers into industry, and will not remedy the labour shortage. It will only make life more of a burden to women workers. We believe that the only way to solve the labour problem is for each major industry to have



MRS LI

a comprehensive system of in-plant training."

MRS ELLEN LI SHU-PUI, Legislative Councillor: "I am in favour of this trial period in night work because I feel that barring women from it altogether is a form of discrimination. But I think that it is very wise to restrict this to factories which have the necessary conditions and facilities, I don't think this will encourage many women to take on two jobs. If they need the money so badly they will take on extra work anyway and do this at night. If you go to the resettlement

estates at night you will find lots of women work at sewing machines late into the night, and in rooms where the lighting has been turned down so as not to disturb the children. You cannot prevent women from doing this, so they might as well go out and work in factories where there are better working conditions, proper lighting, and rest rooms. I imagine too that some single women might prefer night work. Another point is that if you bar women entirely from night work, you might deter some industries from employing them. The unfortunate thing in Hongkong is that so many women are forced to work to support their families. If there was a comprehensive public assistance scheme a woman whose husband is an invalid would not have to take on two jobs."

MRS ELSIE ELIOTT, Urban Councilor: "If they are having employment difficulties in industry the answer would seem to me to be simple — employ men on night work (young men are equally dexterous as women), but they don't

want to do this because women will work for cheaper wages. I am against women working at night, in fact I'm against women having to work at all unless they do so out of choice rather than financial necessity. In Hongkong the reason most women work is that their husbands are not getting a fair wage."

MR J. ENGLAND, deputy director of the Extra Mural Department of the University of Hongkong: "I am dismayed by this decision by the Commissioner. If there were a national crisis, then night work might be necessary, as it was in Britain during the war. But at a time when profits are higher than ever before I see no reason for it. Night work is detrimental to social life and, even with safeguards, to health. Not only am I dismayed by the decision, but I am disturbed by the manner in which it was taken. There was no consultation with the trade unions or the Labour Advisory Board, and it comes at a time when the Colony is already under fire in Britain and the United States for having an economy

based on sweated labour."

DR K. L. STUMPF, director, Lutheran World Service: "I personally feel that it is a step backwards at a time when we are trying to improve our labour legislation and to offer extra protection to women and children. If, as a result of labour shortages, it proved to be absolutely necessary, then I think it should definitely be limited to unmarried women. The argument put forward by industrialists that women WANT to earn more money and are willing to work nights only reveals the flaws in our wage structure. If the average Chinese worker could earn a minimum wage which would guarantee him a decent standard of living, I do not think he or she would forego rest and home life to go out and work at night. I'm sure many women will be tempted to work during the day and also at night, and taking into consideration the living conditions in Hongkong, it will be impossible for them to find rest during the day. This would inevitably take a toll on their health."