

900,000 female factory workers face pay cut

By MICHELLE INNIS

MORE than 900,000 women working in electronics factories will suffer wage cuts if recommendations made in a Government review on working hours for women and young people are adopted.

The *South China Morning Post* was told yesterday the 900,000 women, who receive about \$1,600 a month as assembly line workers, may be forced to work an extra half hour a day — or an 8½-hour day.

But they will not be paid for the extra work because they are paid on a day rate basis — and overtime they currently collect for any work done outside their eight-hour working day will not be paid.

The electronics industry workers will bear the brunt of the recommendations because they only apply to women and young workers

already working a 5½-day week.

It is believed women working a six-day week, particularly clothing industry employees, will not be asked to extend their daily work hours.

Union officials involved in the electronics industry yesterday described the recommendations as “totally regressive”, along with another recommendation in the two-part Labour Department report which suggests maternity leave should be cut.

“Employers want women to forego two weeks of maternity leave which they are entitled to,” said the general secretary of the Clothing Industry Workers’ General Union, Mr Lee Cheuk-yan.

“Women are presently allowed to take 10 weeks’ maternity leave and receive two-thirds of their normal pay.

“Under the recommendations, employers are suggesting women take four weeks before the birth of their child and four weeks after the birth instead of six weeks.

“Employers say individual women workers can negotiate with their bosses to have their leave extended to 10 weeks if they want.

“But it is highly unlikely employers will give women the extra two weeks.”

A spokesman for the Christian Industrial Committee, Mr Apo Leung, described the recommendation as “a step back into the dark ages”.

He said unions had been fighting for years for extended maternity leave and to correct anomalies in legislation governing maternity leave.

“Women already face un-
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Staff face pay cut

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fair dismissal under the present legislation because they are only protected against dismissal during the last three months of their pregnancy.

"Any employer can see a woman is pregnant by the time she reaches her fourth or fifth month and we have had several women complain of unfair dismissal.

"But there is little we can do about it."

It is believed the Labour Department report might also address this problem but Government officials are saying nothing about the recommendations.

The report was prepared by a Labour Department working group following pressure from employers to change both maternity leave and overtime controls on women and young workers.

It will be submitted to the Labour Advisory Board soon.

But a Labour Department spokesman said last night the comprehensive review would not be made public until much later this year.

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He could not confirm who took part in the review but union officials said they had been locked out of the negotiations while employers met with Labour Department heads over the recommendations.

The spokesman said: "The Government is reviewing all legislation which covers women and young workers and hours worked by these employees are naturally included in the report."

Christian Industrial Committee spokeswoman Ms Elizabeth Pang said the recommendations to see electronic workers put in an extra 2½ or three hours a week would cut back overtime earned by women who already receive very low wages.

"The women are paid time and a half for work done outside their eight-hour day," she said.

"The extra half-hour's wages paid at this rate make a big difference to your monthly wage when you are only earning \$1,600 a month.

"We can only hope the recommendations won't be accepted."