

A 'fair deal' for working women

ALL proposed changes to existing legislation covering working women should be welcomed by both employers and employees, and would not lead to exploitation of workers, according to an official of the Labour Department.

"Our aim in conducting the review is to try, in the interests of both parties, to simplify and rationalise some legislations governing the working conditions of working women," Mr Chow Tung-shan, Chief Labour Officer (Labour Relations) said in defence of the review.

The review, which covers both maternity leave and the maximum hours of overtime work allowed for working women, has been completed and a set of recommendations will be submitted to the Labour Advisory Board for discussion next month.

Union members have already wel-

comed many of the proposed changes.

Mr Chow denied that under the review, working women would be asked to work a five-day week and half an hour more each day, rather than the current six-day week which would adversely affect the take-home pay of the workers because many of them are paid on a daily-rate basis.

"We are only cutting some of the red-tape to enable factories to introduce better working hours to employees," he said.

Current legislations are all based on a six-day working week and any employer who wants to introduce anything different from that would have to apply for permission from the Labour Department.

But as more and more factories are introducing a five-day week in a bid to improve working conditions to attract workers, the Labour Department is

considering granting exemption to factories so that they do not have to go through all the routine procedure.

Another planned amendment to existing legislations is on maternity leave, under which working women, after giving birth, can resume work earlier.

Right now, working women are allowed to take six weeks maternity leave after confinement and receive two-thirds of their pay.

Under the new arrangement, working women who feel fit to resume their jobs can choose to return to work four weeks after giving birth.

They would then receive full pay for their work plus the two-third allowance to which they are entitled for the remaining two-week period.

"But employers must have the consent of their workers first," Mr Chow stressed.