

Amend outdated labour laws, govt is urged

THE 180,000-strong Hongkong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU) has urged the government to amend outdated labour legislation, claiming that some of these laws have been in force since the 1950s.

At a press conference yesterday – the eve of the Labour Day today – the federation's chairman Poon Kong-wai singled out the law on "seven days' notice in lieu of dismissal" as a loophole that needed amendment.

He said this piece of legislation had been passed in the 1950s and has not been changed since.

At present, employers need only pay a worker seven days' wages to terminate his services without breaking the law. Mr Poon proposed at least a month's pay for the worker.

Claiming that workers, without whom Hongkong's industrial growth would not be possible, are denied the "fruits of prosperity", he also mentioned the following areas that needed changing:

- Labour Day should be designated a statutory holiday.

- Increase the present 10 statutory holidays to 17, by requiring employers to give more such holidays to their employees from next year.

- Abolish the two-year qualification for severance pay. Mr Poon said piece-rate workers are most vulnerable where

by

Ben Chan

severance pay is concerned since they do not get a monthly salary.

Under the present laws, a worker with at least two years' service is eligible for severance pay of half-a-month's salary for each year he has worked in the company. Mr Poon said this should be increased to one month.

He called for the setting up of a tripartite social security system, whereby the employers, the employees and the government should contribute towards a scheme for workers' pension, medical benefits and employment security.

Mr Poon also said complaints of abuse of the law by employers was increasing. Although he did not have the actual number of complaints by his union members on such unfair practices, he said his union will assess the situation soon.

According to the Christian Industrial Committee, it handled 6,000 labour disputes last year – an increase of 50 per cent over that of 1980.

The Labour Department said it would normally review a new law after its introduction for about six to 12 months.

And Mr Poon said the government should reform the labour laws as soon as possible.