

## Better deal for workers

AT long last there appears to be the possibility that the workers of Hongkong who provide the labour that has made this tiny speck on the China coast a trade paradise are going to get a square deal from their employers. But let us not be too hasty. So far it is a suggestion that has been put forward by the powerful Chinese Manufacturers Association.

Not because they realise that the Hongkong labour force are badly paid and work in many cases in conditions that would not be tolerated elsewhere. But they have woken up to the fact that the considerable movement of employees within industries causes loss of profits and certain management problems.

To reduce this movement employers were called on Thursday by the leaders of the CMA to improve conditions of service and employment to help reduce the movement of the labour force. The appeal came from CMA Secretary-General Mr J.P. Lee at a meeting of the Chinese Executive Club.

Quite apart from the social reasons for wanting to better the conditions of workers, Mr Lee was quite right to point out the effects of considerable movement among industrial sectors and different firms has on the profitability.

For it is only by bringing home to the employers that they are losing out through continual labour movement that they will take the trouble to sit down and work out what must be done to prevent it. This could be the breakthrough that the workers have been waiting patiently for years.

High labour mobility inhibits production plans and creates problems in supervision and the normal conduct of business. Some of this is due to the rehousing of workers who prefer to take jobs closer to their new homes. But management can still help to minimise the effects of movements by avoiding excessive competition for workers among themselves and by fostering staff training.

Fortunately more employers are becoming interested in apprenticeship schemes than previously, and are taking advantage of those already offered by government technical schools. But still there is not enough being done.

Only by improving the conditions under which the workers are employed and ensuring a sufficient supply of trained staff and then offering sufficient inducement to keep them will labour mobility be reduced.

Security of employment, retirement and other benefits would become increasingly important to workers once they got used to the idea. At present there are very few companies that offer any retirement incentive. Because of this the worker does not feel impelled to remain where he is as he has nothing to lose by moving on.

Better conditions for the workers means better productivity, better quality control and more economical running costs. If the employers of Hongkong cannot or will not better the conditions of their employees for humanitarian reasons surely they can see that it is in their own interests to do so for purely business reasons.

Now that the Chinese Manufacturing Association has recognised the need perhaps Hongkong will take the necessary steps to implement Mr Lee's suggestions.