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120 face sack for 'interest in union'

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EXCLUSIVE by MICHELLE INNIS

ONE hundred and twenty engineers are facing the sack and up to 500 may have their pay slashed in a sweeping wage review being carried out by the China Light and Power Company (CLP), one of the territory's largest companies.

A union official said he believed the CLP assault was spurred on by an attempt by engineers to form their own union earlier this year.

A CLP spokesman and union sources confirmed last night that CLP's top 120 engineers have already received letters from management warning them they face pay cuts and job re-location.

The CLP spokesman, who asked not to be named, said letters had been sent to them this week, stating that more suitable jobs must be found for them by June next year, or they will face cuts in their salaries.

But union officials said last night that some of the engineers, usually paid about \$15,000 a month, have already been down-graded, losing about \$3,000 a month.

"And if the company can't find suitable jobs for the engineers, then they may lose their jobs," one spokesman said.

Federation of Civil Service Unions chairman, Mr Waihung Wong, alleged the CLP management had thwarted attempts by workers to hold protest meetings by threatening organisers with the sack.

"I have been told by one of the engineers that a meeting was organised in Kowloon 10 days ago," he said.

"But it was cancelled at the last minute after organisers received threats from the management."

Mr Wong said more than 200 engineers and technicians had planned to attend the meeting to launch protest action against CLP.

He claimed employees had been continually threatened with the sack if they

made any moves of protest against the company's wage review.

"They are very frightened and will not speak to press or try to organise meetings."

Mr Wong and other union leaders told the *South China Morning Post* they believe an attempt earlier this year by the engineers to establish their own union was the catalyst for the CLP action.

One union leader said only the top 12 grades of engineers, from two CLP departments, had been affected so far, but there had been no indication that the sweeping review would not affect all of the company's engineering staff.

The job re-locations and pay cuts are part of a pay review carried out six months ago by an independent consultancy firm, Hay Associates.

Union officials said the firm also recommended amalgamation of several grades of engineers employed at CLP.

They also said Hay Associates also had been appointed to conduct a Government review on civil service wages.

"We believe there may be some link between the two reviews," Mr Wong said.

"If private sector wages are lowered, then there is a fear that Government wages will be brought into line as well."

Legislative Councillor and Chairman of the Hong-kong Federation of Trade Unions, Mr Tam Yiu-chung, said the trade union is very concerned about employees at CLP.

"The issue has been going on for some time. I know there has been a pay level survey concerning wages."

"The Federation is most concerned but doesn't want to make any comment at the moment because negotiations between management and workers are continuing," Mr Tam said.

But Christian Industrial Committee spokesman, Mr Hanz Lutz, confirmed the engineers' meeting had been halted by threats from CLP

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120 engineers facing sack

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management and wage cuts were looming.

"All this trouble has come after an attempt by the engineers to form their own union," Mr Lutz said.

"CLP management will deny this but we feel it is true."

Another CIC spokesman said the company, which employs almost 7,000 people and earned profits of \$1.27 billion last year, was carrying out a "witch hunt".

But the CLP spokesman

denied this was happening and said although the 120 workers had been notified of possible changes to their jobs and wage losses, the company would do everything in its power to ensure employees' positions are maintained.

"CLP has had a wage review and it has been found that a number of employees are being overpaid," he said.

The company would rely on natural attrition in the workforce to ensure the engineers keep their jobs.

"If one of their fellow workers leaves through natural attrition, and the responsibility for his work falls on another worker, then that man will not receive a pay cut or lose his job," he said.

"If this doesn't happen, then they may face a regrading and a loss of pay."

Although he said that will be faced when the time comes, he said he could not give assurances that the 120 workers would not be sacked.