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# Angry staff to negotiate with HK Telephone

DISGRUNTLED telephone company workers today begin negotiations with the company over big cuts in their salaries.

Four representatives from the Hongkong Telephone Company Chinese Workers' Union will hold talks with company executives. Another 100 representatives from various departments will also attend.

The company has announced changes in its salary structures which effectively mean pay cuts of \$500 to \$5,000 a month for some staff.

Union secretary Mr So Man-hing said: "Many union members have urged radical action including industrial action.

"The union cannot rule out these possibilities but we hope to settle the problem through talks."

Staff said there would be no major inconvenience to the public if there was industrial action because only clerical staff are affected by the new pay scale.

Company spokesmen said some staff from the customer services and accounts services divisions had refused to answer telephones but inquiry calls were not affected.

The wrangle is the latest in a spate of labour disputes.

Government clerical workers are considering work stoppages and industrial action by hospital pharmaceutical dispensers was averted in 11th-hour talks last week.

The telephone company workers facing pay cuts are mainly junior clerical staff grades I and II.

They are upset by the company's plan to combine the two grades from April.

This would effectively cut some monthly salaries from about \$6,300 to \$5,800, almost 13 percent.

Grade II clerical officers in the civil service receive \$3,725 to \$8,245 a month while grade I officers get \$8,660 to \$11,015.

Mr So said: "A total of 1,700 staff are affected. Grade I clerical staff will suffer salary cuts. And grade II clerical staff will have no promotion prospects."

Also facing cuts are a limited number of personal secretaries as the company plans to combine private secretary grades I and II. For grade I secretaries, this effectively means a salary cut of \$5,000 to \$10,600.

Senior clerks will effectively lose \$1,700 a month under the new scheme.

Workers are also concerned that the cuts will reduce their 10-year gratuities.

Hongkong Telephone personnel manager Mr Ho Yiu-cheong said the revisions were planned because an evaluation by Hay Management Consultants had revealed that salaries of some clerical and secretariat grades were higher than the standard in the rest of the community.

The company's managing director, Mr Gregory Crew, said the salary cuts would be gradual. Increases over the next five years would be slowly reduced.

To compensate junior staff the company would introduce a medical scheme for them. Such schemes had previously been the privilege of senior staff.

Mr So said some staff had contacted the Labour Department for help.

"They were told it is a matter of terms between the employer and employees."

The union has 1,400 members. The company has a staff of about 10,000.