

\$300,000 for jobless

Felix Lo

In the last two weeks, Labour activists have taken the unemployment problem into their own hands, putting more than \$300,000 into a fighting fund to help the jobless.

The Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) said it may use part of the fund to set up "mutual aid groups" or job co-operatives in which unemployed people with similar skills and needs would get together and be assisted by the federation to seek work.

The vice-chairman of the FTU, Lam Shuk-ye, said the federation had taken action because the Government was not doing enough to tackle the unemployment problem.

"How much the Government has been doing to help the unemployed, everyone can see for themselves. That's why

we thought we should at least do something and not just do all the talking," she said.

Lam said she was not calling for the Government to financially assist the unemployed indefinitely, but she believed it was necessary for urgent needs to be met.

A random telephone survey was conducted by the federation earlier this week, polling 7,107 people, many of whom were workers.

Thirty-five per cent of those surveyed said they would consider donating money to a union fund for the jobless, while 17 per cent said they were in need of payments from such a fund.

The FTU said it had already sent a letter of application to the taxation department for the right to conduct fundraising activities.

The mutual aid groups idea was in the process of being examined, Lam said.

"For instance, if a group of unemployed people are interested in doing cleaning work, they would be grouped together to learn the skills and share the equipment."

The in-house lawyer of the FTU, Kwong Chi-kin, said they were also looking into options for fundraising, including selling raffle tickets and setting up street stalls.

The survey found that many unemployed workers had no idea they could approach the Social Welfare Department for unemployment benefit payments, Kwong said.

She admitted though that not all applicants may be eligible.

She said the federation would visit applicants' homes to look at their situation and financial condition before its assessment committee would decide the amount of money to be paid out to them.