

Do not be made pawns of others, unionists told

197 - FEB 1990

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir ~~Mohamad~~ reminded local trade unionists not to believe their Western counterparts when they declare that their sympathy lies with Malaysian workers.

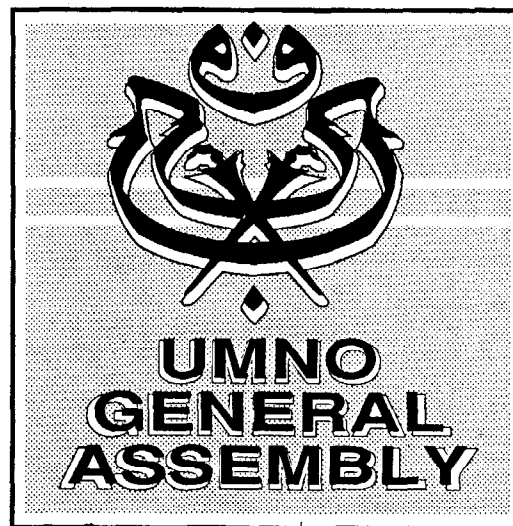
Trade unions in industrialised countries were, in fact, trying to incite their local colleagues to make all sorts of demands from their companies, failing which they were encouraged to take industrial action to back their claims, the Prime Minister said.

Western unionists' interference had undermined the industrial harmony of many countries, including those which had been industrialising rapidly, he added.

South Korea and Taiwan were riding high at one time, but their performance had since been adversely affected by industrial unrest when their workers fell prey to negative influences from Western unionists.

They could no longer compete with the Western countries, their economic growth had declined and they may not become industrialised countries now, Dr Mahathir said in his speech at the opening of the Umno general assembly.

But oppressed workers from countries which were not competing with the



economies of Western countries are hardly given any attention by the unionists from these countries.

Some Western countries suffered economic decline because there was no industrial peace. The Prime Minister then drew the audience's attention to the involvement of local unionists in politics, saying that their participation offered workers little gain.

Dr Mahathir said: "In the recent general election, a trade union group was used as a tool by a group of poli-

ticians for their self-interest. Trade unions are allowed to function not for politics but to protect the interests of workers. They are given certain rights to struggle for the lot of workers.

"Some politicians say that the interest of workers will be better protected if their leaders were involved in politics and could form the Government. Maybe this is logical. But the experience of other countries has shown otherwise. Instead, the workers' fate

took a turn for the worse.

"This is one of the reasons why communist and socialist ideologies are rejected today. Workers in communist countries are nothing more than slaves of their countries.

"And the economies of many socialist countries are declining even though they were once prosperous. Workers in 'workers' heavens', as claimed by the communists, led lives of misery and did not get the rewards promised by their union leaders, who gained power through the support of the 'working class', he said.

He said society's views of the employer and employee has changed. Minimum standards and proper treatment of workers was assured and protected by laws and the Government.

Other than in the communist countries, workers were generally a respected group in society and talented ones can look forward to a higher standard of living.

The Prime Minister said: "Children of a labourer need not end up labourers, too. Upward mobility is a reality in this age."

He also said the general public supported laws protecting workers, and today no oppression of workers could take place. Now, workers were free to make a success of themselves, to

seek an education and progress from hired employees to being their own bosses, or move into other fields which had more potential.

A society of different classes does not exist anymore. Such has been the development of trade unions that workers received salaries which were way above minimum wages. They lived in luxury and could take industrial action which could create problems for society if their demands for yet more pay was not met.

"In such a situation, should we continue to use industrial action to settle disputes between an employer and the workers? Strikes and other methods to force the employer to bow to workers' demands cause big losses to both parties."

Industrial action becomes a burden to the public because in the end it was the people who had to bear higher costs when companies met workers' claims. It was naive to think that only the employer would have to absorb the extra costs.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was developing rapidly and needed investments, be it from local or outside sources. If industrial peace did not prevail,

no one would be willing to invest.

He said: "Why should they expose their capital to losses? If there is no investment, there will also be no job opportunities. If there are no job opportunities, claims by whatever means for salary increases by workers cannot succeed.

"But if there is peace, investments will increase, and entrepreneurs will rush to hire workers. This is happening in Malaysia. Because of this, the level of wages has gone up even without pressure of industrial action."

He said that if the Government was sometimes seen as being averse to industrial action, it was not because the Government was anti-worker, but rather because the Government was pro-worker.

"The Government wants their income and purchasing power to increase. With a better income, the workers can buy more goods, which will boost the market, which will in turn spur other industries such as manufacturing, import, transport, oil and 1001 other business activities which are labour-intensive.

"The Government's coffers will also grow and the benefits will also be enjoyed by public sector employees," he added.