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`Unseen hands preventing amendment of Labour Ordinance'

KUCHING, Sun. - The Malaysian Trades Union Congress today claimed that "unseen hands" in the private sector were using their economic and political influences to prevent the Sarawak Government from amending the Sarawak Labour Ordinance 1959.

MTUC president Senator Datuk Zainal Rampak, who made the claim, appealed to those involved to be "good corporate citizens" and open-minded as workers in the State had suffered long enough.

"Both the Federal and Sarawak Governments must work harder to resolve this long-standing issue of incorporating various features of the Employment Act (as used in the peninsula) into the Labour Ordinance, which is outdated," Zainal said when opening the MTUC (Sarawak) office at Jalan Tun Ahmad Zaidi Adruce here. A major drawback of the Labour Ordinance is that it only covers manual workers.

The Ordinance too is silent on many things such as retrenchment benefits and leave.

Zainal said the MTUC had been fighting to get the Ordinance amended for many years and it "will fight till the end" so that workers in the State could enjoy the same benefits like their counterparts in the peninsula.

He added that he had brought the matter up in the Dewan Negara on many occasions and recently reminded Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn of it.

Zainal also lamented that both labour problems and issues involving industrial relations were at present handled by the Sarawak Labour Department.

"We are going to urge Fong to create a separate department for labour and another for industrial relations like in the peninsula.

"The nation's economy is picking up... I am sure there will be a boom in the economy, and as such there will be a lot of trade disputes in the State in the future," he said.

On the proposed minimum basic salary of RM1,200 for all classes of workers both in the private and public sectors, Zainal said he looked forward to a positive response from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad soon.

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