Raw deal for local workers

BY HAFIDZ BAHAROM

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) told theSun last week to expect 50,000 more retrenched employees this year. The sectors affected will be manufacturing, insurance, banking and retail, according to the federation. I would have thought the plantations industry would be involved, but apparently not.

MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said this would be due to several factors: the foreign worker levy now imposed on employers rather than employees, the implementation of the Employee Insurance Scheme (EIS) and the increase in maternity leave from 60 days to 90 days.

This has riled me up a bit because it shows where the members of the MEF are in their mindset – they would rather fire Malaysian citizens rather than stop hiring cheap foreign labour, and they would rather female workers not take three months off to recover after giving birth to a child.

What kind of business environment have we created in Malaysia?

At a briefing at a plantation GLC some time ago, I was told the “3Ps” still remain “people, planet and profit” – but people always came first. So, I have to ask, when did our local workforce become toxic?

So perhaps it is time to tell the MEF something – times have changed around the world, and that change is coming to Malaysia. Employers have to treat workers right.

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The number of job losses this year is not available as of the time of writing. However, in 2015, a total of 37,699 Malaysians were laid off, as reported by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

The increase in the daily maternity leave is a burden.

At the same time, if the Employee Insurance Scheme was a problem for employers, who are now thinking of firing some 50,000 employees, then perhaps it is a good thing that the scheme exists to give the affected workers RM600 monthly for three months while they seek new gainful employment.

Honesty, if times are tough and those retrenched decide to get a job doing ride sharing with their liability turned asset in the form of a car, wouldn’t it be useful to have at least a guaranteed RM600 for three months while they start out?

After all, it was the members of the MEF who objected and fired them – to make way for foreign worker costs, no doubt.

And finally, the issue of maternity leave.

We are now living in times where women are getting medical leave if their menstruation cramps are unbearable. And yet, is the federation so hooked on productivity and costs that an extra month’s maternity leave is a burden?

It seems even more awkward when the MEF lists banking as one of those sectors affected by this policy because a bank started the ball rolling on extra maternity leave. So, perhaps there are banks that would like to say aloud that as members of the MEF, they would rather their female employees be entitled to 90 days maternity leave because they are worried about the banks’ profits.

In a decade or so, more issues will rise up where both parents get equal leave for having a child, employing foreign workers will get harder, and automation and other innovations will make hiring even local white-collar staff harder compared to vocational graduates.

So perhaps it is time to tell the MEF something – times have changed around the world, and that change is coming to Malaysia. Employers have to treat workers right.