

## Routing out MC abusers

THE blood of employees nationwide must have run cold to read what the Malaysian Medical Association's president had to say about medical chits (MC) yesterday. Medical chits were merely doctor's recommendations and employers could reject them if they believe that the medical leave was unwarranted.

As the cost of doing business keeps rising, and employers scrutinise every possible corner for cutting, many hard-fought labour rights are slowly being chipped away in the name of the bottom line as the balance of power tips back to industrialists. Still, that the matter had to come to this should be of no surprise to anyone. According to the Malaysian Employers' Federation (MEF), Malaysia has the highest medical leave rate in the region and, to be more to the point, "faking it" is rampant. The act of defrauding any system eventually opens it up to measures being instituted that run counter to the initial objectives of that system. In the case of MCs, unfortunately, this would be to the detriment of honest, genuinely ill employees.

Fortunately, so far, the MEF has largely rejected the idea of rejecting MCs because if they get it wrong, and something happens to the employee, the employer is liable. But, this generosity only goes up the letter of the law. Over the years, the MEF has been wanting the government to amend the Employment Act to reduce the number of sick days employers are obligated to give to employees, but this has been opposed by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress on account that it would victimise employees with genuine medical problems. After all, the world is supposed to have moved on from the time when slaves were whipped to the last millimetre of their life in order to wring every drop of blood from their bodies.

To be fair to decent employers and decent employees, the problem of faking a medical leave (either through pretending to be ill or in collusion with unscrupulous doctors) happens because of the lack of integrity on the part of some employees, who do not seem to realise or care that such false claims amount to theft (of manpower). Some of these rotten apples even think of the MC allowance as another form of annual leave and thoroughly utilise it year-in-year-out until their employer finds a legitimate way to dismiss them. It is these people who make it difficult to attain the ideal of good industrial relations, where employees do fair work and employers pay a fair wage. Many honest workers do not resort to taking an MC if they can help it (sometimes to the point of coming to office with a full-blown contagious illness and infecting everyone else), and those who do so genuinely need the recovery time in order to work in top form. So, in dealing with the scoundrels, employers must tread a very fine line so as to not victimise honest employees and alienate their loyalty.