

On A Cautious And Vigilant Mode

By Timothy Fernandez, Vanessa Teo and Naseema Banu Maideen

Union leaders also affirm their support for the National Wages Council's Guidelines for 2009/2010 as they attest to these recommendations that are working well on the ground. They will continue to work closely with management partners to save jobs for workers and also urge their members to upgrade their capabilities to remain relevant and employable in the workforce.

Persist To Cut Costs To Save Jobs



"From the start of the economic crisis, the electronics sector has been working very closely with the union to cut costs to save jobs and only retrench as a last resort. This is why despite the severity of the downturn, the number of workers retrenched in our sector is very much smaller than what was expected. So, the cost-cutting measures with the companies to save jobs has worked very much in that direction. Most of the companies we have worked with recently are very appreciative of what the union and government are doing to help them."

Cyrille Tan, United Workers of Electronic and Electrical Industries General Secretary



"We should continue to be cautious although there could be some slight recovery in certain areas, but what we have heard is that it may not be sustainable. So, we should continue to cut costs to save jobs to keep retrenchments down and at the same time, work with companies to train up workers, re-skill them and also help to place more people on jobs to keep the unemployment rate down."

Cham Hui Fong, Chemical Industries Employees' Union Executive Secretary

Management To Lead By Example



"We have always encouraged management to lead by example. If there are any wage cuts or wage freezes to be implemented, we make sure that the management leads by example by taking a deeper cut to their pay or similarly not get any increments themselves. In the metal industries, there have been quite a number of companies on shorter work weeks and management has been taking the lead and taking cuts to their salaries as well. Union negotiations have been successful so far in encouraging managers to lead by example."

Tan Chai Kun, Metal Industries Workers' Union General Secretary



"When business outlook is not good, it is important that management comes forward to take the lead in cost cutting measures. This approach will serve as a sign of commitment that both employers and workers are in this crisis together. In our branches, this has been the way forward. Management leaders are the first to bear the cuts, be it in terms of pay or other incentives. Many others are doing likewise and this is what will keep us strong and make us emerge even stronger when the upturn shows up."

Lim Kuang Beng, Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union General Secretary

Managing Non-Wage Costs



"Many of our companies are affected by the decline in demand worldwide. Our employers need to think of long-term sustainability and access on measures to be in place so as to reap the benefits when economy recovers. I am sure employers will realise that Singapore is still a premium choice location for investments, especially with our unique advantage of strong tripartism. In the short term, they need to mobilise resources available to them such as taking advantage of SPUR (Skills Programme for

Upgrading and Resilience), Jobs Credit Scheme and other government assistance programmes to minimise costs of operation and at the same time, build new capabilities."

Ong Chin Ang, Healthcare Services Employees' Union and Singapore Port Workers' Union Executive Secretary

Enhancing Wage Flexibility



"The flexible wage system has the potential to help many companies and workers in this downturn, but its effectiveness will be tested this year. Companies with such systems in place will find it useful when they are making quick adjustments to their compensation systems in accordance to their business performance. With such flexibility already in place, it will also be easier for companies to explain to workers why certain reductions are necessary

to cut costs for the company so that more jobs can be saved."

Rajendran s/o Govindarajoo, Chemical Industries Employees' Union President

Improve Productivity



"One key way to improve productivity is to adopt flexibility. And when it comes to flexibility, it should be a two-way approach – both for employers as well as employees. Employees must understand that they cannot afford to take a back seat in the areas of up-skilling and re-training to gain greater mobility. In hotels, for example, when occupancy rates tend to decline, workers have to accept that they must acquire new skills to be able to be re-deployed to other areas of work and in this way, remain employable."

Abdul Subhan Shamsul Hussein, Food, Drinks and Allied Workers' Union President

Press On With Downturn Initiatives To Enhance Resilience



"The outlook to the second quarter of the economy is still unclear, therefore workers and members will still need to tighten up their belts. We need to prepare for the future so that Singapore can be the first to emerge out of the dark tunnel. Within our sector, our transport workers may not be adversely affected by this economic downturn and we still have many opportunities for jobseekers. We will continue to encourage more Singaporeans to join our industry by working closely with e2i (Employment and

Employability Institute), especially those who are affected by the downturn and are willing to make a switch to a different sector."

Fang Chin Poh, National Transport Workers' Union General Secretary

Managing Excess Manpower



"These are good guidelines in very difficult times. We cannot see the 'rainbow' yet. Fortunately, we have good and responsible union leaders and we are able to see the bigger picture. Together with management, we will help to explain to our union members how they can take the necessary measures to ride out this very difficult journey. Workers should also adhere to the measures if their companies execute them fairly. Even though it may be tough to accept now, the final results will definitely be worth it."

Terry Lee, Singapore Insurance Employees' Union President

Strengthening Tripartism In Adversity



"As the tripartite partners address the immediate challenges of this recession, we must not lose sight of the future. In the midst of the stormy economic climate, we must seize new opportunities and look beyond the immediate problems to ensure that we emerge stronger as a country after the downturn."

Richard Tan Peck Hoon, HDB Staff Union General Secretary

Pressing Ahead with Long Term Initiatives



"It is important, as we fight on with resilience in this crisis, that we also do not lose focus of our long-term goals that will impact the livelihoods of our workers. In our public sector, we will push on for policies on re-employment and job re-design. One main focus will be on enhancing the employability through upgrading capabilities of our significant pool of corporate support officers. We will press on with initiatives to up-skill and re-train these workers so that they remain relevant to the industry."

Teo Yock Ngee, Amalgamated Union of Public Employees General Secretary



"Our immediate concern is how to cut costs and save jobs, and this is clearly on every union leader's mind. For older workers and back-to-work women, there are definitely opportunities in the workforce. We have tapped on the ADVANTAGE! scheme to help older workers, and also introduced shift work to encourage women to come back to work. We are doing our best to help these two groups of people to become or stay employed."

Nakalingam Silva, Union of Security Employees President

NTUC Ok To Scrapping Mid-Year Bonus For Civil Servants



By Nicolette Yeo

NTUC and its eight affiliated civil service unions are backing the decision by the Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office, to hold back civil servants' annual mid-year Annual Variable Component. They made the conclusion after taking into account the uncertain economic outlook and the renewed call by the National Wages Council to "cut costs, save jobs and enhance competitiveness".

Explained Madam Halimah Yacob, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General: "We note that many private sector employees have already been affected by cost-cutting measures, such as bonus and/or pay cuts and wage freeze as their companies weather the global crisis. The zero mid-year AVC will align the public sector with what is already widely practiced in the private sector during these difficult times.

"We are also glad that overall, the low-income workers have been less affected by the total wage cuts compared to the higher income public sector employees. In this respect, we welcome the leadership by example shown by the senior civil servants who are taking a bigger reduction in pay. This is the right thing to do and will make it easier for our low-income workers to accept wage adjustments."

Madam Halimah also praised the government's plans to create 18,000 public sector jobs in the next two years, and highlighted that the Labour Movement will continue to help out by up-skilling and re-skilling workers through NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute).

"The decision was reached after close consultations with the unions. AUPRE recognises that the economic outlook remains uncertain, and hence supports the zero mid-year payment. This is a necessary cautious approach to adopt in this unpredictable global economic condition. This is also in line with NWC's recommendations. Employees in the civil service stand by the nation in tackling the challenges of the downturn, and believe that if we stay united in taking the necessary moves to overcome the odds together, we will be able to ride out the storm sooner."

Teo Yock Ngee, Amalgamated Union of Public Employees General Secretary

"AUPDRW understands that the current economic downturn has affected countries worldwide, and Singapore is facing an unprecedented recession. AUPDRW therefore supports the decision of zero mid-year payment. I am sure that our members and workers understand the challenging economic situation that we are in, and the need for a cautious approach to be taken in view of an unstable and unpredictable global economic situation. In fact, we are grateful that there has been no retrenchment and pay cuts in the public sector, as compared to the private sector employees. With everyone taking the necessary steps during a downturn, we believe that when the economy recovers, we will be able to bounce back faster, and our workers will be recognised and appreciated for their contributions and efforts."

G Muthukumarasamy, Amalgamated Union of Public Daily Rated Workers General Secretary