

Keep The Faith



By **Halimah Yacob**
NTUC Deputy Secretary-General

Enjoy Twice The Support Of Workers During Bad Times

The economy is looking up and so is the mood of our workers. After one whole year of nothing but bad news and severe belt tightening measures, they are relieved and cheered by the better 3rd quarter economic performance and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's remark that a second dip is less likely.

Last year, many workers were not paid any bonuses and, this year, most also did not receive any wage increases. Coupled with a cut in overtime which can account for between 20 and 30 per cent of monthly wages, and shorter workweeks, the situation

has been pretty tough for our workers. Many still have their jobs, thanks to the Resilience Package, but the impact of a drop in income is no less painful.

So, many workers who I have spoken with are looking forward to receiving some payments at the end of the year, unless of course their companies are doing so poorly that it would not be reasonable or fair to expect any payment. Our workers are very practical and in the latter situation they are happy to at least keep their jobs as their companies ride through the storm.

One worker described the situation aptly when he said "during bad times we share our

companies' pain. So, during good times, we also hope to share the gains". Another said "the year end is the most important period for us as there are increased expenditures because we have to buy the children's school necessities, settle outstanding bills and, if there are extras, use them to spend a little time together with our families."

The recession has been pretty hard on low-income families, in particular. Most do not have any savings and depend on their year-end bonus to meet their regular needs or other contingencies. Moreover, the cost of living is still a concern for them as they experience a higher Consumer Price Index rate.

It is important that companies recognise the sacrifices of our workers as this will not be the last recession that we face. Every recession teaches us the same lesson. Companies that keep faith with the workers during good times will have twice the support during bad times. Such companies can move faster with minimal disruption to their operations whilst still keeping their staff morale high.

Restore Wages If Possible



By **Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal**



During this downturn, it has been inevitable that a large number of members from the Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union feel a pinch of the poor economy.

SISEU President Tan Peng Heng said: "Our members have made financial sacrifices which have also affected their families. These sacrifices came about when the companies they work for implemented various ways to cut costs to keep afloat, for example, wage freeze, shorter workweeks, reduced allowances, reduction in overtime and in some cases, wage cuts. These cost cutting ways have also led to preserving jobs, for which the union and our members appreciate."

Despite the efforts to cut costs to save jobs, the textile manufacturing industry has been badly hit by retrenchments. The union has been doing its best to help members secure new jobs. For those who require training, SISEU is bridging them to initiatives by NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency.

Now that the Singapore economy is moving towards an upturn, Mr Tan hopes companies will reflect the positivity onto the workers as well.

"Going forward, we would like managements to seriously consider restoring wage cuts as much as possible. We are aware that some companies are still struggling. We will continue to journey with them. There are also many companies that are showing improved financial health and a pick up in orders. We urge these companies to restore wage cuts and give out bonuses.

Such a gesture will go a long way in strengthening trust between managements and workers, which can only lead to a more motivated team that will work with increased efficiency and higher productivity."

SISEU is also preparing to be "Cheaper Better Faster" and the first order of the day is for all to have a clear understanding of what



Formed in 1981 after NTUC restructured the omnibus unions into industry-wide unions, the Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union represents employees in Real Estate, Aerospace, Textile, Printing, Light Manufacturing, Leisure, Logistics, Technical and Consultancy Services. The union currently represents about 175 companies with 15,714 Ordinary Branch and 38,392 General Branch members as of October 2009.

the Labour Movement's new rally cry is about.

"From our feedback, members and management have different perceptions of the meaning of 'Cheaper Better Faster'. So we will hold dialogues with our branch officials, who have the most contact with management, to explain the initiative to their managements," said Mr Tan.

STOP PRESS! CapitaLand Restores Wages

CapitaLand Limited announced to its staff on 6 November 2009 that it will fully restore the wages of its executives who took a 3 to 20 per cent pay cut last year – to loud cheers.

A year ago, CapitaLand took steps to cut cost to save jobs and avoid staff retrenchments. The management led by example by accepting a salary reduction, thus minimising the impact on junior executives and non-executive staff. The early intervention reassured the rank-and-file staff that the management was fully prepared to ride the storm together with them. In turn, the union and staff provided strong support to the company in other cost-cutting measures to counter the effects of the downturn.

Mr Tan Seng Chai, CapitaLand's Senior Vice-President (Human Resource), said: "CapitaLand Group has performed significantly better this quarter than the previous two quarters and we are seeing an improvement in the business outlook in our core markets. In the light of the continued business recovery, we have decided to restore company-wide salary reduction implemented in January this year as part of our cost management measures. We thank our staff for their understanding and for riding out, together with the company, the earlier global crisis and difficult business situation."