

Time To Go On The 'Offensive'

LM Switches To Attack Mode In 2010 To Sustain Singapore's Economic Recovery And Strive For Full Employment

Many war experts agree that there are two parts to winning a war – destroy the enemy and sustain the victory. The same principle may be applied to the ongoing battle against the global economic downturn.

At the conclusion of 2009, with economic recovery peeking from the horizon for many economies of the world, the first part of the battle can be said to have been won. The second part of the battle now begins to prepare for the upturn in 2010 and beyond.

At the Labour Movement's year-end media conference 2009 on 28 December at NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute), NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say revealed that many countries, including Singapore, will be "working on two fronts" this year.

"The first front will be trying to sustain the recovery and rebound of the economy. The second front is to create as many jobs so that they can bring down the high level of unemployment."

What then is the Singapore Labour Movement's strategy for tackling 2010? Going back to the successful football approach introduced in March last year by the tripartite partners which scored a "less pain, more gain" outcome for 2009, SG Lim said that the Labour Movement will switch from a defensive mode in 2009 to an offensive one, with new tactics.

"Firstly, we will look forward to the recommendations of the Economic Strategies Committee to ensure that the rebound, recovery of the Singapore economy will be sustained in 2010 and beyond.

"Secondly, we look forward to working very closely with our tripartite partners to ensure that as we continue to recover, we must continue to lower the unemployment rate. In fact, we should strive to return to full employment as soon as possible.

"As we try to reduce the unemployment rate to below 3 per cent, we must also try to continue to work closely to increase employment rate," said SG Lim.

While lowering the unemployment rate and increasing the employment rate may sound "same same", they are, in fact, different.



LM Goes On The Attack...(from left) e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) Chief Executive Officer Ang Hin Kee, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Ong Ye Kung, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Heng Chee How, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Jacob, and NTUC Competency Director (Industrial Relations) Cham Hui Fong at the Labour Movement's year-end media conference 2009.

SG Lim clarified: "Increasing employment rate means, firstly, we have to pursue a higher level of re-employment, in other words, ensure that the employment rates of the older workers will continue to increase.

"Secondly, we must try to reduce the rate of structural unemployment which is the key thrust of e2i, as well as minimise the mismatch between employment and employability. This must continue into 2010 to ensure that the low-skilled workers, the lower educated Singaporeans can be part of the inclusive workforce."

Another key tactic, said SG Lim, was to tackle underemployment, specifically workers who were not realising their full potential, such as the middle aged PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives, and Technical People).

"Many of them will need to undergo a process of retraining to update their professional skills, their professional knowledge, and in some cases, acquire multi-disciplinary skills to remain relevant to the workforce."

Already, the Labour Movement's pre-emptive "attack" for the upturn, the "Cheaper Better Faster" movement launched at end-August 2009 has gathered positive and encouraging response from businesses and is looking good for 2010.

SG Lim detailed: "We have companies that have set up the 'C' workforce, 'B' workforce, and 'F' workforce. The 'C' workforce will come up with strategies to be more productive so that they can be 'cheaper'; the 'B' workforce will upgrade capabilities so that they can compete with their competitors better; the 'F' workforce will come up with strategies to multi-productise their production line so that it can produce multiple products. Each worker can be multi-skilled to handle different production lines so they can be 'faster'."