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Do Well Do-Gooders Do More Together To Top \$23M



Pictures by Alvin Toh and Vincent Nghai

By **Marcus Lin**

The call was to raise a record \$20 million by the end of May 2009 for the Labour Movement U Care Fund in aid of needy low-income and retrenched workers during this economic downturn. And what a resounding response there was!

From the word go on 11 March 2009, contributions poured in fast and furious so much so that the target was met ahead of time and exceeded expectations – \$23,188,197 to be exact.

Announced at the May Day Solidarity Walk and Concert held at the Marina Bay Golf Course

on 23 May 2009, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say called the fundraising a big success and was grateful for the overwhelming support shown by every union and affiliated association, every NTUC Social Enterprise, more than 100 unionised companies, the Singapore Labour Foundation as well as other corporations and companies.

He said it is significant and not just another fundraising event: "It is our commitment as a Labour Movement together with the tripartite partners who are fellow Singaporeans, fellow workers. Yes, we are going through this downturn. Yes, we all have to tighten our belts. At the same time, we fully understand the kind of pain that they are going through. Every one of us is sharing some pain, rather than let some workers bear all the pain of retrenchment. But

even as we share this pain, we must find ways to relieve some of this pain.

SG Lim said every dollar will be put to good use and "in fact, starting from next week, we will start to distribute the money. It will be used in at least two ways. Firstly, some of our existing programmes will be further strengthened and, secondly, some new programmes will be introduced."

The U Care Fund will go towards providing some immediate relief for retrenched workers not fairly compensated and those on a shorter work week affecting income. Schemes like the U Stretch vouchers, the Back-to-School programme, and scholarships and bursaries for children of low-income workers will also be enhanced.

"The reason we have to do this is because

the world is not out of the woods yet; Singapore's economy is not out of the woods yet. Within the unionised sector, we are in close touch with companies on the ground. On the one hand, we are happy to see that the production orders are coming back. So for the second quarter, the loading is better than the first quarter.

"On the other hand, some companies are facing problems, for example, with payment. Customers may place production orders but they may not be able to pay for the orders. Secondly, in some cases, customers may be asking for prices to be further reduced. In other words, loading can be there, but the profit margin is not there."

SG Lim stressed that even though the retrenchment rate within the unionised sector in the second quarter of this year is lower than the first quarter, the question is whether "the momentum in the second quarter will pull through to the third and fourth quarters. So in the unionised sector, the companies are still adopting a very cautious approach. We recognise that as we go through this second quarter, we must still keep an eye on the third and fourth quarters.

"The moment we let go of our efforts to cut costs to save jobs, we are going to see retrenchments going up. The moment we stop our efforts in helping jobseekers to upgrade their skills, to re-skill, to up-skill and take on new jobs, unemployment will go up.

"Therefore, this downturn is far from over, the world is far from being on track to a full recovery and the Labour Movement and the tripartite partners are not taking it easy."



Fast And Furious... NTUC Club's seniors community, U Live, participated in the May Day Solidarity Walk. If anyone had expected the past-50s to go at a snail pace, they were surely surprised. Having kept fit, the contingent was a force to be reckoned with as they ploughed their way through the 2.3km distance. At the end of the walk, fingers showing 'V' for victory signs went up. Picture and story contributed by NTUC Club.