Minister for Manpower Lim Swee Say shared the focus of the Ministry of Manpower (MOM)’s labour policies at the Committee of Supply on 8 April 2016.

Support industry transformation to become more manpower lean and more productive

Minister Lim said that Industry Transformation Maps will help Singapore to visualise the industry of the future, make better use of technology, manpower and innovation to overcome the bottlenecks of limited resources, especially manpower limitations. In addition, the Lean Enterprise Development Scheme (LEDS), which was launched by MOM and the agencies under the Ministry of Trade and Industry last year, will help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to develop their capabilities and manpower, as well as grow their markets.

Building a strong Singaporean core

To help to build a strong Singaporean Core, Minister Lim said every Industry Transformation Map will be accompanied by a Sectoral Manpower Plan (SMP), formulated by the Sectoral Tripartite Committees. With the SMPs, we will be able to look ahead and identify what kind of jobs will be created and what kind of skills need to be developed for the future, so that we can support the growth of the industry in the future.

Minister Lim also announced the “Adapt and Grow” initiative which will provide enhanced employment support to help Singaporeans, especially the mature professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs) and those affected by redundancy. The initiative comprises:

i. Enhancements to the Career Support Programme (CSP), Professional Conversion Programme (PCP), and P-Max schemes to help more PMETs; and

ii. Expansion of the Place & Train scheme to more sectors to help rank and file workers, and enhancements to the Work Trial scheme that allows workers and employers to have a trial period of 80 hours.

Strengthening the global competitiveness of the Singapore workforce

Minister Lim said that MOM will refine the processing of employment pass applications. Besides assessing individual criteria, MOM will also be looking at three additional factors that are company related. These include:

i. How strong the Singaporean core of the company is;

ii. Among those with a weak Singaporean core, their commitment to nurture and strengthen the Singaporean core for the future;

iii. And in consultation with the relevant economic agencies, how relevant these “double weak” companies – i.e. weak Singaporean core, weak commitment to nurture Singaporean core – are to our economy and society.

Based on the recommendations of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), these “triple weak” companies will be put on the “Watchlist”. TAFEP will engage these companies and review their progress. “Triple weak” companies with no progress may, at the recommendation of TAFEP, have their work pass privileges suspended.

Minister Lim added that MOM will also recognise and partner “triple strong” companies – which have a strong Singaporean core, have a strong commitment to nurture the Singaporean core and, have strong economic linkages or social impact to Singapore – by launching a Human Capital Partnership (HCP) later this year.

Plugging into a New Game Plan

With workers at the heart and core of the Labour Movement, NTUC will now focus on workers’ evolving needs, expanding its services and growing a stronger network.

By Jonathan Tan

“The Labour Movement must be a reflection of the structure of the economy. As that structure evolves, we too, must evolve. As the needs of our people change, we too, must change,” said National Trades Union Congress Secretary-General (NTUC SG) Chan Chun Sing in his maiden May Day Rally speech at Downtown East on 1 May 2016.

At the heart of the Labour Movement’s focus is the commitment to take care of workers, be fair to them, and help them grow in their careers.

“The best way for us to take care of our people is to ensure that they have good jobs to enable them to take care of themselves,” said SG Chan, pointing out that it is integral for NTUC to be developer, mobiliser and integrator to effect such an outcome.

Embracing The Future

As developer, the Labour Movement will work with partners such as institutes of higher learning to develop relevant courses for workers looking to upgrade themselves or pick up new skills.

As mobiliser, the Labour Movement has the responsibility to get all working people to embrace life-long learning for tomorrow.

As integrator, the Labour Movement will look at turning diverse policies into actionable plans. One of the ways to do so is to work with NTUC’s tripartite partners to develop a stronger system of career counselling.

SG Chan recently revealed that NTUC is also co-developing a network of auxiliary career coaches together with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and NTUC’s e2i (Employment and Employability Institute).

This will complement a series of training and upgrading programmes that can be readily available to all workers so that they can pick up new skills.

Evolving Needs

The worker segments in Singapore have also evolved beyond just rank and file workers to now include professionals, managers and executives (PMEs), freelancers, evergreen workers, and others on contract.

“Specifically, they are looking for career development opportunities, training programmes, opportunities to network and opportunities to work beyond Singapore where they can be globally competitive,” he added.

Expanding Services

Reiterating the close working relationship the Labour Movement maintains with its tripartite partners, SG Chan cited, TAFEP, Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and Employment Claims Tribunal (ECT) as new avenues for workers to get help and support.

With unions the backbone of the Labour Movement, SG Chan also shared that a Leadership Council will be formed to groom new leaders with the right values—prioritising the interests of workers above all else.

“The Labour Movement has to expand to provide training and development opportunities for the entire workforce so as to uplift an entire generation of people,” he said.

Growing Networks

As a means to reach out to and engage with a greater number of workers, SG Chan shared that NTUC will be working with professional associations and guilds through its U Associate programme.

NTUC will continue to engage with SMEs through the U SME programme, in addition to large multinational corporations (MNCs).

SG Chan also announced an extension to the Inclusive Growth Programme administered by NTUC’s e2i.

Another focus lies in expanding the Labour Movement’s scope of protection to include workers such as freelancers and contract workers.

The eventual goal, according to SG Chan, is to create greater value for NTUC’s members, and at the same time, allow the unions, associates and partners to grow together with the Labour Movement.

This article encapsulates the points NTUC SG Chan shared during his May Day Rally speech on 1 May 2016 and at his media briefing on 28 April 2016.
Tripartite Challenges in the Future Economy

The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), supported by the MOM, NTUC, the Singapore Labour Foundation and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency organised the inaugural BeyondSG50 CEO Roundtable on 2 February 2016. The event was attended by 50 CEOs from companies across 17 different industries. Dr Robert Yap, President of SNEF, chaired the discussion with Minister for Manpower Lim Swee Say and NTUC SG Chan Chun Sing.

SNEF identified three groups of challenges:

i) Changing workforce demographics;
ii) Labour disruptions caused by technological advancements and new business models;
iii) And productivity gaps.

Minister Lim shared three possible outcomes – the ugly, bad and good – that could result from these challenges. The ugly outcome would be locals becoming a minority in the total workforce due to the liberalisation of foreign worker inflow to achieve economic growth. The bad outcome would be stagnant productivity growth and economic growth, caused by MOM continuing to moderate the intake of foreign manpower without any productivity growth. He stressed that to avoid the bad and ugly outcomes, it will be vital to work towards manpower-lean growth and speed up transformation. Only then can we achieve the good outcome of 3% GDP growth driven by 1% workforce growth + 2% productivity growth.

SG Chan outlined the need to prepare workers for the future. He stressed the need for the Labour Movement to work with the Government and businesses to develop and strengthen the Singaporean core.

Dr Yap spoke of future-readiness, flexibility, workforce management, sustainable inclusive growth and effective tripartism. He reiterated SNEF’s commitment to have responsible employers for sustainable business and highlighted that tripartite partners need to maintain a strong tripartite relationship to achieve this.

Creating Fair and Progressive Workplaces

For companies to be successful, Minister for Manpower Lim Swee Say believes it all boils down to looking out for the employees.

“Help workers to be happy, healthy, productive and purposeful,” said the Minister, Lim, in a challenge to companies in Singapore.

Speaking at the TAFEP Exemplary Employer Award on 8 April 2016, he said companies with such workers would do better because they could better attract and retain good workers and stay competitive.

2016 TAFEP Exemplary Employer Award

This year, there were 15 Exemplary Employer Award winners, nine of whom were new entrants.

Minister Lim acknowledged the award winning companies’ efforts in going the extra mile and showing their commitment to implement fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

One of the winners was DBS Bank, a supporter of lifelong learning. Its Managing Director, Group Business HR, Theresa Phua, said that in line with the Government’s SkillsFuture drive and in the spirit of continuous learning, DBS will introduce a new programme called “DBS SkillsFlex”. All Singaporean employees ranked senior associate and below will receive a $500 DBS SkillsFlex Credit annually.

“On top of the 10,000 courses in the SkillsFuture Credit Course Directory, these employees will be able to participate in 50 courses customised for DBS by NTUC LearningHub. The courses cover topics that are especially relevant to today’s rapidly changing landscape, including social intelligence, computational thinking and new media literacy,” said Ms Phua.

TAFEP’s 10th Anniversary

Minister Lim noted that 2016 marked TAFEP’s 10th anniversary, and over the years TAFEP has introduced many initiatives to help companies implement fair and progressive workplace practices.

To date, over 4,300 organisations have signed the Employers’ Pledge of Fair Employment Practices. As part of the pledge, TAFEP works with these employers to help them create fair and inclusive workplaces. TAFEP also helps workers who have encountered workplace discrimination.

At the event, Minister Lim also announced that TAFEP will be taking on a bigger role in engaging companies which are “triple weak” – those with a weak Singaporean core, weak commitment to nurture a Singaporean core and poor contributions to the economy and society – as well as those which are “triple strong”. 