A new tripartite mediation process will be introduced from 1 February 2011 by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), with the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), to help Professionals, Managers and Executives (PMEs) and their employers to resolve key employment disputes.

The criteria for PMEs to be eligible for tripartite mediation are as follows:

i) Monthly basic salary up to $4,500

ii) Individual member of any registered trade union without any form of representation rights

iii) Employed in a non-unionised company

PMEs who satisfy the above criteria may approach their trade unions or federation for assistance to submit employment disputes to MOM for tripartite mediation.

The three types of common employment disputes which tripartite mediation aims to resolve are:

a) Salary arrears
b) Payment of retrenchment benefits; and

c) Breach of individual employment contracts (employment terms and conditions).

A key feature of tripartite mediation will be the involvement of Tripartite Mediation Advisors (TMAs) who will be nominated by Tripartite Partners and appointed by the Minister for Manpower. TMAs will provide advice and assistance to the parties with the view to resolving the dispute.

Employers recognise that there is an increasing number of PMEs in the workforce and some of their employment problems may need to be addressed with third-party assistance. This tripartite approach will enable disputes to be resolved quickly and cost-effectively for both parties.”

SNEF President Stephen Lee

“[Tripartite mediation] offers PME employees and their employers a more amicable way of resolving some of the employment and salary issues with the help of the tripartite partners. This is a constructive and win-win development for both parties as we speed up the pace of upgrading and transformation of our economy.”

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say

The importance of raising productivity, gains sharing, a flexible wage system and the national aim to raise real wages by one-third in 10 years was high on the agenda at the Singapore Tripartism Forum Tripartite IR Seminar 2010 on 15 November 2010.

Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong said productivity should be rewarded. He added that MOM will introduce programmes to train productivity managers, “so that they can also understand how to introduce productivity initiatives, how to measure productivity improvements, how to design packages and systems that will help motivate the workers to be part of the productivity movement.”

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say said it is important to support the Inclusive Growth Programme: “Are you going to up-skill the low wage workers’ minimum skill? Secondly, are you going to restructure the job to enhance their productivity? Are you going to give them labour saving devices, enhance their working environment so that with higher skills they can produce higher output? Thirdly, we want to go for minimum skills, with one that keeps going up; we want to go for higher productivity but, bottomline, we want to know to what extent for those workers will the wages go up?”

SNEF President Stephen Lee emphasised the important role of employers: “Productivity is something that management must take the lead. The workers say, ‘We are willing, tell us what to do’. This is a much better situation than when the workers are not willing. In a tight labour market, the workers can just sit back and say, ‘I’m not willing’, simply because of the tight labour market. Progressive companies are moving and if you are not moving as a company in terms of productivity movement, you will end up paying wage increases without reaping any productivity gains.

“After a few years, you will be lagging far behind and it will be difficult to catch up. Take advantage of the programmes, the funding that are already in place and a very cooperative NTUC, and move your company.”
Leadership Is Critical

Good Tripartite Relations are Essential

SINGAPORE HAS ENJOYED industrial peace for decades thanks to the high level of co-operation among tripartite partners. However, this sustained peace and harmony would be threatened if tripartism is not continued through successive leadership.

The Tripartite Leadership Programme by the Singapore Tripartism Forum on 29 November to 1 December 2010 at Orchard Country Club gave 24 participants a deeper understanding and appreciation of the practice of tripartism.

Developing trust through working and interacting together is crucial. SNEF Executive Director Koh Juan Kiat said: “Anyone who works in the tripartite arena must be prepared to spend the time to develop this trust.” It is also important for the tripartite partners to be credible, not only among the three partners, but also with their own constituents.

MOM Labour Relations and Workplaces Division Director Ong Yen Her said: “If you are not trustworthy, then after some time people would not want to deal with you very seriously. Credibility and trust are very important.” A credible tripartite partner must also be neutral in trying to achieve an objective on a national scope, he added.

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Heng Chee How said for tripartism to be strong, each party also has to be strong in its own right: “You have to ensure that each of the three parties will have a continuous pipeline of leaders at all levels to learn and to work together, so that one generation of good work will not crumble with the passing of that one generation.”

SNEF TOGETHER WITH Temasek Polytechnic (TP) organised the 2nd Structured Human Resource Internship Programme (SHIP) for TP students majoring in Psychology and Business Studies from 20 September 2010 to 10 December 2010. The programme comprises a two-week stint at SNEF visiting tripartite agencies and companies, and a minimum 10-week programme at a member company.

The key objective of this programme is to provide these 27 BUS/HSS students (with HR & psychology electives) a holistic perspective on the Singapore Industrial Relations climate during their industrial attachment, a bridging opportunity to their academic studies. These students were also exposed to the deployment of psychological tools in the context of HR practices which include practical training in HR functional areas such as recruitment and selection, psychometric assessment, labour market research, employee relations and cross-cultural HR practices.

We wish the 27 SHIP interns success in their future endeavours.

“Tripartism will continue to play a big part in addressing tomorrow’s challenges. There will be periods of transition, where the current generation of tripartite leaders begins the process of handing over to the next. It is important that we ensure the essence of tripartism, and the relationship and trust among the tripartite partners are passed on to the next generation.”

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower and Education Hawaii Dapi

Mr Hawazi Dapi (front, in long-sleeve blue shirt) with the TLP participants.

To find out more on Tripartite initiatives and free subscription of this e-newsletter, please visit the Singapore Tripartism Forum website at http://www.triartism.sg

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