

Former NWC chief 'had soft spot for workers'

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A SOFT-SPOKEN man with a softer spot for workers.

Unionists and employers yesterday paid tribute to Professor Lim Pin, 79, who helmed the National Wages Council (NWC) from 2001 before stepping down last year. DBS Group Holdings chairman Peter Seah, 68, has been appointed the council's new head.

"During the NWC negotiations, it was clear that Prof Lim was concerned about the well-being of workers," said National Trades Union Congress assistant secretary-general Cham Hui Fong. "He was especially worried about whether low-wage workers and older workers were able to raise their productivity and share the companies' gains."

NWC specified in 2012 that workers with basic monthly pay of up to \$1,000 should get a built-in increase of at least \$50. It was the first time in nearly three decades that the council had spelt out a pay rise. The council continued to push for a minimum \$60 increase for low-wage workers in 2013 and last year.

Employers also credited Prof Lim with balancing workers' and firms' needs during wage discussions.

"He is a very good listener," said Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) vice-president Alexander Melchers. "The negotiations were very calm and never tense because of Prof Lim's temperament... He is also very analytical. He is not an economist, but he has the brains of an economist."

A medical doctor by training, Prof Lim is also a former vice-chancellor of the National University of Singapore.

On the new head, SNEF said: "We are confident that Mr Seah will steer the NWC on a steady course to raise wages in a sustainable manner."

Industry observers said NWC will need fresh ideas to boost productivity and help lower-wage workers. Singapore Management University law professor Eugene Tan said: "Mr Seah may be keen to have the employers appreciate the critical role of equitable wages in keeping businesses competitive."



Under Prof Lim Pin's leadership, NWC pushed for pay rises for low-wage workers.

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