

MP Chen Show Mao's speech on Ministerial Salary Review

Mr Speaker Sir,

The Workers' Party view the committee's report with a sense of hope because it is a step in the right direction. We agree with the three principles that political salaries should be competitive, that political service is a calling and has its own ethos, and that wages should be transparent.

Political service is a calling and not be treated as discount factor

However, the order by which the principles are applied has produced in our view a flawed new benchmark. Because competitive salary is placed as the first principle ahead of political service, the committee has pegged ministerial salary to the median salary of the 1000 top-earning Singaporeans and then applied a discount for political service.

If the new benchmark is accepted by the Government, it would continue to send the message, to potential political office holders and the people of Singapore alike, that top pay is the benchmark by which the importance of the office is to be judged, and that the value of political office can, in the final analysis, be monetized. It cannot be, Not even at the highest income levels. Political service is a calling; it is a privilege accorded by the electorate to serve the largest number of our fellow Singaporeans. It is primarily a privilege, not primarily a burden or sacrifice. The principle of political service should come first and not be treated as a discount factor.

Whole of Government, People-up approach

Because political service is in the genre of public service, we propose a whole-of-government, people-up approach that benchmarks Ministerial salary to MP allowance, which is in turn pegged to the pay of the civil service bench-marked to general wage levels. Because political service starts with our election as parliamentary representatives of the people, MP allowance should be the starting point. The Cabinet is the constitutional extension of Parliament and the institutional expression of the legislature's control over the executive. It is not an extension of the private sector.

This whole-of-government, people-up approach is a pragmatic reality in many well-governed, developed countries and territories around the world.

Is Singapore unique? Of course. But it is not so dissimilar to others that we cannot learn from their best practices and how they apply good principles.

For example, the committee writes, "As is international practice in Westminster Parliamentary systems, the ... political appointment holders will also receive MP allowances as they have the dual roles of being MPs".

Parliament Sovereignty is paramount

We agree that the Ministers should receive their MP allowances. But that is because, Ministers are MPs first, they are not merely also MPs. We must remember that in our system of government, Ministers are first of all MPs elected by the people as their representatives. Not selected by the Prime Minister from the private sector into the Cabinet and then also MPs. Parliament is the highest authority in our system of government, and MPs, as elected representatives of the people, should be the starting point for the determination of ministerial salary. The committee's benchmark to the private sector clouds this fact. Worker's Party recommends pegging ministerial salary as multiples of MP allowance. This expresses the fact that ministers are first and foremost elected as MPs to serve and represent the people.

So in what multiples should Singapore peg ministerial salary to MP allowance? We propose that an entry-grade minister's monthly salary be 5 times the MP allowance, and 9 times for the Prime Minister.

As DPM said, there are no right or wrong answers, and this is ultimately a judgment call. We propose multiples based on the increased responsibilities and additional capabilities and experience required of the different political offices in Singapore. We also believe that this is where the principles of competitive salary and transparency can come in, to take into consideration some of the factors cited by the committee as to why the system of Singapore may be different from those in other countries. In the words of DPM, we believe the pay should be sufficient to not deter potential political office holders with desire and ability, from serving in political office without undue concern for their standards of living.

Of course we would like to see capable men and women in the Cabinet. But I do not believe that our best people for political office are only those who make the most money. Many of our former and current Ministers did not come in from the private sector or the top earning professions, that is as we would expect. Many of them were public servants who heeded the call of political service by standing for elections.

Political service is in the nature of public service. We believe that MP allowance should be set with reference to the salary of senior executives in the regular civil service. This is consistent with the general practice in most of the countries and territories we surveyed.

The starting salary of entry-grade senior civil servants in the regular civil service — a director of MX9 grade in the Management Executive Scheme of the civil service (outside of the Administrative Service) is approximately \$11,000 a month.

In our proposal, MP allowance would be about \$11,000 per month, Ministerial salary would range from \$55,000 per month for entry-grade ministers to \$99,000 per month for the Prime Minister.

We support the clean wage proposal for transparency, in which compensation is fully accounted for with no hidden items. In addition to a fixed 13-month salary that is keyed

to MP allowance, we propose that the ministers and the prime minister receive variable pay of different bonuses that add up to no more than five months in any year (compared to 13.5 months recommended by the committee). Many Singaporeans may take home up to 3 or 4 months of bonuses in a very good year, compared to 13.5 months for the ministers as recommended by the committee. In fact, if the maximum bonuses recommended by the committee were awarded, the reduction in entry-grade minister pay would be 8% and not the 31% calculated by the committee.

In our whole-of-government approach, since civil service salary is aligned to general market conditions faced by Singaporean workers, MP allowance and ministerial salary will move with the income levels of many more Singaporeans than with the total employment and trade income of the top-earning 1000, including their bonuses, commissions and stock options. The Workers' Party's benchmark will better help our leaders empathize with the majority of Singaporeans and not just the very few.

Inclusivity vs Exclusivity

The Workers' Party's proposed approach aims for enhanced inclusivity and sensitivity to the progress of Singaporeans, rather than discounted exclusivity pegged to top earners. We believe the committee has taken the right step forward with the three principles. It is up to the Government now to go further to apply the principles in the right order by recognizing political service as the first principle, anchored in the primacy of parliament. Let us place ministerial pay on a sound footing in order to ground political leadership in a strong sense of service to all Singaporeans.

Thank you. And now, if I may, in Chinese.

议长先生，

我们认可委员会提出的三大原则：一、政治职位薪金应该具有竞争力；二、从政应该有奉献精神；三、薪酬应该完全透明。

但遗憾的是，这三大原则在奉行时的先后轻重，却使整套新的方程式出现了根本误区。把部长薪金与全国收入最高的 1000 人挂钩，然后为了反映政治服务的奉献精神再打个折，这个做法突显了委员会优先考虑的是高薪的原则，这只会进一步强化现有的错误观念，认定从政的价值到头来还是要以金钱来衡量。

我们当然希望有意愿从政的人不会因为薪水过低而裹足不前。但前提是，他立志从政该不是主要因为薪水高，而是因为他先把为国为民服务视为己任。这才是我们应当坚守的第一原则。

认清了从政的本质是公共服务，我们就应该采纳“整体政府”的方案，部长薪金应以议员津贴为基准，而议员津贴则与公务员薪水挂钩。毕竟，在我国的宪政体系下，内阁是国会的延伸，内阁从来不是私人企业界的延伸。

这么一种“整体政府”、由民间从下而上的方案，也在世界许多国家与地区推行。

当然,新加坡的国情向来就是独一无二的。但再怎么特殊,也不至于完全找不到其他体制值得我们学习的地方吧?

委员会的建议反映了一个政治盲点:我们的政治领袖可不是直接由私人企业界遴选出来担任部长,而后再兼任民选议员的。相反的,他先得当选为议员,才能受委进入内阁担任部长。因此,部长薪金不应当与私人企业界的薪金水平挂钩,而是应该以国会议员的津贴为基准。

认清这一点后,我们可以考虑第二及第三个原则了:议员津贴的多大倍数才足以确保部长薪金保有竞争力,而又透明化?工人党的建议是:部长薪金应介于议员津贴的五倍至九倍之间,以初级部长倍数最低,总理倍数最高。这个范畴比国际标准来得高,应该足以反映新加坡独特的国情。

委员会的建议所反映的另一个误区是,认定最优秀的从政人才该出自收入最高的1000人当中。我们现任与前任的部长当中,就有好多位并不是私人企业界或者高薪专业出身的。不少部长来自公共服务领域,更有些是先从议员做起,慢慢累积政治经验后再升任部长。

整体来说,以收入水平论从政才能,反映的恰恰是我们的社会典型的精英主义的狭隘心态。

综上所述,我们建议采取“整体政府”方案,部长薪金是议员津贴的倍数,而议员津贴则等同于高级公务员的起薪,大约每月11000元。而既然公务员的薪金也与新加坡其他员工一样取决于经济状况及市场条件,这个方案更能确保部长薪金不会与人民的薪金水平脱钩。与其由私人企业界收入最高的1000名精英由上而下再打折,我们认为较适当的做法是从民间由下而上,由公务员薪金为起点,制定议员津贴,最后再乘以倍数制定部长薪金。

我们支持实行透明化的裸薪制。但是委员会建议的花红数额显然过高了。报告书说部长将减薪31%,那是以平均7个月的花红来计算得出的结果。但是花红总数额最高可达13个半月,如果花红全领了,部长薪水基本上比检讨前只减少8%。

因此,工人党建议,在固定的十三个月年薪以外,部长与总理所获得的所有花红数额,应该设定顶限,总共不得超过五个月。这么一来,在景气好表现好的年度里,部长与总理,可领多至十八个月的薪水,而不是委员会所建议的26个半月。

工人党期许部长薪金制度能以更包容更贴近民生的方式来制定,而不是只局限在社会金字塔顶层的一小撮精英范畴内,而后再通过打折,努力地尝试贴近民生。委员会所制定的三大原则是值得肯定的,接下来就有待政府如何将这三大原则的先后轻重厘清,充分体现政治领导层为国为民服务的使命感和高尚本质。

谢谢。

