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**SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT AWARDS
PRESENTATION CEREMONY AT THE NTUC CLUB UNION HALL
ON FRIDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 1991 AT 4.30 PM**

It was six years ago when we launched the Membership Recruitment Campaign in 1985. I am pleased to note that membership of NTUC affiliated unions reached 213,382 in September this year, the highest level for more than ten years.

Every year, our unions recruit thousands of new members. However, we also lose a great number of members due to a variety of reasons.

Retrenchment, promotion and retirement are some of the reasons why workers leave unions. But the most common reason that account significantly for membership losses is the change of employment of our members. Between 1985 and 1990, more than 90,000 members (or 90 per cent of all membership loss) left their unions when they resigned from their companies for jobs elsewhere. Some of these may join unions later if their new companies are unionised companies, but many join companies which are not unionised.

Trade unions derive their strength from their members. To ensure that trade unions remain a strong and relevant force in the industry, we must continue to expand our size by adopting an effective organising strategy to reach out to more workers.

We launched the NTUC Club Card Scheme in 1986. The card provides union members a host of benefits and privileges. This

scheme has been very successful in attracting workers to join unions. In fact, I have often been told that even executives and managerial staff are also keen to join unions in order to enjoy the benefits. NTUC will therefore, in the months ahead, intensify its effort to provide more benefits to union members through the NTUC Club Card Scheme.

A high profile campaign will be mounted by NTUC next year. We must find ways to attract the new generation of workers. This nationwide campaign will be undertaken by the Organising Secretariat, with the aim to increase our membership and to improve the image of trade unions in Singapore at the same time.

I have just outlined what NTUC will be doing in the months ahead to recruit more union members. Our affiliates must also play their part so as to make the nationwide campaign a sustainable and successful one. There are two areas which you can do to complement our effort. They are:-

- (a) Firstly, unions must place high priority on the organising of workers. Every union should have an Organising Committee and reserve part of their annual budget for organising activities. And unions must be more active in forming new branches. Whenever possible, full-time organisers should be recruited. Unions must also give due recognition to organisers and branch officials for their efforts and commitment.
- (b) Secondly, some of the unions could look into the possibility of setting up a General Branch in their unions to allow workers who have resigned from their company to remain members of their unions. This class of membership should also be extended to workers in non-unionised companies, particularly the smaller enterprises, where unions traditionally have difficulty organising. The union will, of course, not be able to conduct collective bargaining for members

in the General Branch. These members should, however, be given the right to vote and speak at union general meetings and enjoy other benefits of union membership. The setting up of a General Branch in a union would therefore allow workers to maintain their link with the labour movement even when they leave the workforce or join non-unionised companies. Allowing workers in non-unionised companies to join the General Branch of a union will also be an asset because it will facilitate the union to organise workers in these companies subsequently.

On this note, I wish to congratulate all the winners of this year's NTUC Membership Recruitment Awards. I hope you will continue your efforts in recruiting new union members with even greater dedication and vigour.

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