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Epilogue

This concluding chapter has been designed to provide a brief discussion of the population policy changes that were introduced after the manuscript was completed and submitted for publication. The inclusion of the latest changes will render the book more up-to-date when it is finally made available to prospective readers. Most of the changes were announced in the budget statement delivered by the Minister for Finance in Parliament in April 2016. The policy changes deal mainly with the strengthening of existing pronatalist measures, and only a few completely new measures were presented.

It was announced that the paternity leave, first implemented in 2013, would be enhanced by giving a second week of compulsory paternity leave paid for by the government. Currently, only one week of paid paternity leave is compulsory, though employers may offer a second week on a voluntary basis. Under the new scheme, the government is required to pay for the second week of compulsory leave, capped at \$2,500 per week, plus CPF contributions.¹ This is meant to ease the financial burden of employers. Furthermore, employers will be given sufficient time to make all the necessary adjustments, particularly the work schedule of their workforce, as the new measure will only be provided to fathers with babies born from 1 January 2017.

An additional perk for the fathers is that they will be permitted to share up to four weeks, instead of the present one week, of their wives' sixteen weeks of paid maternity leave with effect from 1 June 2016. Combined with one week of childcare leave and one week of infant care leave, fathers will be able to receive a total of eight weeks off work within one year of the birth of the child. This, coupled with the longer paternity leave, will allow fathers to play a bigger role in parenting and

to help the parents to achieve a much better work-family balance in their home when both parents are working.

Another policy change concerns the amount of maternity leave accorded to unwed mothers. It was announced that from early 2017, unwed mothers will be able to receive the same sixteen-week paid maternity leave as that given to married mothers.² This is an increase from the current eight weeks that they can get. This new measure will be implemented only in early 2017 since Parliament will need to amend the laws first. Mothers who adopt children have not been forgotten. Such adoptive mothers will be entitled to receive twelve weeks of paid maternity leave to look after their adopted child, up from the current four weeks. The adopted child must be a Singapore citizen below twelve months of age, and be adopted on or after 1 July 2017. The more generous maternity leave for both unwed and adoptive mothers constitute a major shift in attitude towards giving more attention to the welfare of the children.

It was also announced that children born to unwed mothers will be provided with a Child Development Account (CDA) where the government will match the deposits contributed by the parents into the account, subject to a maximum of S\$6,000.³ The funds in the account will be useful in taking care of the childcare and healthcare needs of the children, thus supporting their efforts to look after their children and to reduce the disadvantages that the kids may face as compared to those of married women. The new CDA account will be implemented during the third quarter of 2016.

The rapid ageing of the population consequent on prolonged below-replacement fertility has been accompanied by a slow growth of the workforce, causing a perennial shortage of workers in most sectors of the economy. Not surprisingly, the question of retirement age has engendered considerable public debate among employees and employers alike. To elevate the shortage of labour, the government has been raising the retirement age in the past. With effect from 1 July 2017, the re-employment age will be raised from 65 to 67, and the current law supporting pay-cut up to 10 per cent for workers reaching 60 will be abolished.⁴ Before the implementation date, the government will continue to support employers who voluntarily re-employ older workers beyond 65 by continuing with the 3 per cent wage offset for employers who re-employ workers above 65.

A few new schemes were announced in Parliament to support mainly low-income families with young children. These include the First Step Grant and kidSTART.⁵ The former scheme allows children born on or after 24 March to automatically receive S\$3,000 in their CDA account. Under the existing scheme, parents would have to deposit money into the account first before they can get the matching grant from the government. But the First Step Grant will provide the S\$3,000 grant without the parents being required to make any contribution at all. It was ascertained that some parents could not benefit from the CDA scheme because they are too poor to be able to put in money or can only put in a limited amount into their children's account. Another new scheme to help the children of low-income families is known as KidSTART, which is designed to combine government and community resources to help the children have a better access to learning and developmental support.

A new scheme was also announced in Parliament in April 2016 to recognize the contributions of national servicemen when they start a family. Under the Celebratory Gifts initiative, NSmen will receive S\$100 worth of vouchers when they get married or have a child.⁶ These vouchers can be used at participating merchants, including grocery and food and beverage outlets. This scheme will be implemented at the end of 2016.

The latest policy changes outlined above shows that the small island-state of Singapore, faced with serious population problems and challenges, has to constantly look out for additional incentives to encourage parents to produce more babies. Discounting the annual fluctuations in fertility, the varied and comprehensive population programmes at the disposal of parents have exerted a strong influence on the course of fertility, preventing it from moving towards a continuous downward trend, and may even induce it to move on a gentle upward path in the years ahead.

Notes

1. "One More Week of Paternity Leave to be Compulsory", *New Paper*, 20 March 2016.
2. Kok Xing Hui, "Unwed Mums to Get 16-week Maternity Leave", *Straits Times*, 13 April 2016.
3. Marie Lim, "Changes for Every S'poreans", *New Paper*, 16 April 2016.

4. Chuang Peck Ming, "Re-employment Age Rises to 67 from July 2017", *Business Times*, 9-10 April 2016.
5. Charissa Yong, "First Step to Benefit Lower-Income Parents", *Straits Times*, 26 March 2016.
6. Adrian Lim, "New Moves to Recognise MSmen Contributions", *Straits Times*, 8 April 2016.

