



At Home In Your Job

By Jansen Yeo

T rue or false? Singaporeans shun work in the transport industry due to its shift work, long hours and low pay. False, said Mr Ong Ye Kung, Acting Executive Secretary of the National Transport Workers' Union.

"Many people say the same for jobs in the manufacturing, services or construction industry. It would appear that Singaporeans don't work anymore, and surely that cannot be true.

"There are indeed certain sectors where work is done mostly by foreigners, which Singaporeans will not do. Domestic help is a clear example. But the truth for most other sectors, including transport, is that for several years, Singapore had a very tight labour market, and there were just not enough local workers to go around. So on the ground, Human Resource managers and recruiters have the impression that workers are choosy. But the fact is that workers did have choices, and we must expect people to make choices when they have them," explained Mr Ong.

With jobs in great demand nowadays, this represents a golden opportunity for the NTWU to introduce more Singaporeans into the industry. The successful launch of the Job Recreation Programme for the Bus Captains and Service Leaders of SBS Transit Ltd and SMRT Corporation Ltd respectively in 2005 resulted in an increase of their basic salary to \$1,200, which instantly attracted more than 400 Singaporeans to join the industry.

This year, in view of the downturn, NTWU has worked closely with SBS Transit, SMRT and e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) to embark on a series of outreach efforts and job



Welcome Aboard... NTWU Acting Executive Secretary Ong Ye Kung encourages jobseekers to give the transport industry a test drive.

fairs to attract more people into the industry. The inaugural recruitment drive was held on 20 March 2009.

"We pulled the operators together, got e2i to organise monthly job fairs, introduced bus driving as a profession to jobseekers, improved the terms of employment, and many locals stepped forward to apply.

"After a jobseeker enters the industry, he would very quickly realise that this is really a working community dominated by locals. The mentors are Singaporeans - there is a lot of professional pride at the workplace, a

strong union that looks after their interest, and collectively, the Singaporean drivers are helping the Malaysians and Mainland Chinese adapt to Singapore life.

In other words, they feel a strong sense of being at home. So, as long as we hold on to that, Singaporeans will continue to join the profession," shared Mr Ong.

Our transport industry is expected to grow in the near future and there will be a need for more Singaporeans to fill these vacancies. It may present a challenge for NTWU, but it is one which the union is confident of stepping up to.

Driven By SPUR

With support from e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) and NTWU, SBS Transit Ltd and SMRT Corporation Ltd received more than \$3 million under the SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience) scheme. This will help the companies save costs, put in place or expand their training programmes, and extend their recruitment efforts to help more Singaporeans looking for jobs during the downturn.

The union is also working with crisis-affected non-public transport companies to adopt cost cutting measures and stop retrenching workers. Instead, the companies are now cross training them and placing some on SPUR.

Grooming The Next Generation

The future continues to look bright for NTWU, as the union continues its recruitment efforts to bring in new members and train potential ones to lead. As part of leadership development, the union has stepped up efforts to encourage and induct younger members to join its ranks through Young NTWU, a social platform for younger union leaders and members with projects and activities that encourages them to play an active role in the union.

"We need to continue to develop and nurture future union leaders so that NTWU will continue to progress and grow with fresh ideas and energy," said acting ES Ong.

The National Transport Workers' Union was formed in 1981. It has a membership of 17,891, comprising 14,042 Ordinary Branch members and 3,849 General Branch members. The union has a membership target of 19,000 for 2009.

Inside Track

UNLV Singapore Undergrads Get Better Understanding Of Labour Movement And its Working



by Audrey Seah
 Head, Industrial Relations, FDAWU

As part of an outreach to youths joining the hotel industry, the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers' Union, with the support of the Ong Teng Cheong Labour Leadership Institute, gave 50 undergraduates from the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Singapore (UNLV Singapore), an insight to the Singapore tripartism framework.

These students are taking the university's Degree in Hotel Administration programme and they will eventually enter the industry as executives, supervisors and managers.

"It is important for future managers, who will someday be responsible for ensuring a positive work environment, to understand the value that unions provide to the stability

of the workforce," said Dr Andy Nazarechuk, Dean of UNLV Singapore.

The two sessions, each lasting two hours, covered the role of the Labour Movement, the National Trades Union Congress and its tripartite partners. Details on membership benefits and common industrial relations issues were also shared by OTC institute's Deputy Director Ivan Tan and Assistant Director KT Mathew.

Professor Gaylene Levesque, Director of Marketing & Communications for the university, noted that students and professors found the sessions enlightening and interesting. The interactive nature of the presentation also kept the students involved and enthralled.

FDAWU General Secretary Tan Hock Soon said these sessions offered a unique opportunity for FDAWU to touch base with students entering the industry and that FDAWU and OTC Institute will be looking to formalising this arrangement with UNLV Singapore.

Driven To Help

By Jansen Yeo



As a former Chinese teacher, Peggy Chen was already driven to help people. While her peers were spending their days chilling out, watching movies, and such, she devoted her free time to doing more for the people's welfare as the Assistant General Treasurer of the Singapore Chinese Teachers' Union, a post she held since 2003.

Her stint with the union gave her the chance to participate in NTUC activities and be part of the Young NTUC Committee. This eventually revved up her passion for the Labour Movement and encouraged her to join the Taxi Operators' Association as an Industrial Relations Officer.

"Through these experiences, I got a better understanding of the meaningful work that the Labour Movement is doing for the workers," recounted Miss Chen.

Now a Principal Executive with TOA, one of her roles is to manage public perceptions on taxi services and she has been working closely the NTUC Corporate Communications Department to tackle Influenza A (H1N1 Virus) swiftly and tactfully.

She elaborated: "Taxis are very much a part of our daily lives and the general public takes a keen interest on taxi-related issues such as fare increases, fuel surcharge and the service of taxi drivers. Recently, when news of the Influenza A (H1N1 Virus) outbreak started to reach our shores, TOA moved quickly to ease public fears.

"We were able to respond swiftly to issue the Tripartite Advisory for taxi drivers on the virus to instil confidence in the public that taxi drivers practice good personal hygiene and take care of the taxis when providing their services. We also persuaded all the taxi companies to give the assurance that should a driver be diagnosed and quarantined due to H1N1-related causes, the companies would waive their rental and pay for their medical bills. This is important in giving drivers peace of mind."

A firm believer in tripartism, she has seen for herself on several occasions how important it is for the tripartite partners to work together to overcome any challenges. She cites an example

that took place last year: "The Land Transport Authority suddenly implemented the Taxi CBD ruling which restricted taxis to stop only at designated taxi stands in the Central Business District. This affected the taxi drivers greatly. However, under the leadership of our TOA advisor and NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Seng Han Thong, we took the initiative and swiftly engaged LTA. And we were able to drive a change - the rule was relaxed within days to allow the use of side roads for pick-up and alighting of passengers. Taxi drivers felt a great sense of relief immediately.

"The good thing that came out of this crisis was the importance of a strong tripartite relationship to work on issues on an industry level. Therefore, we turned a crisis into an opportunity to strengthen our collaboration with our tripartite partners. We have been able to address issues and move things on a high level through this platform for the good of taxi drivers ever since," added Miss Chen.

Ultimately, Miss Chen feels that it doesn't really matter where she works as long as she is learning and developing on the job, and able to contribute and apply what she learns effectively.

"I think as an IRO, it's very important for us to be mission driven. We must figure out the big picture and know that we have been entrusted with the responsibility to help our workers. For me, a very strong motivation comes from the knowledge and belief that what I do makes a difference in the life of workers and to just go ahead and do it. With the support of our leaders and fellow colleagues, we can work together and do a good job.

"There is a saying in Chinese, '敬业乐业', which means that 'if you respect your profession, you will enjoy it'. This is what I believe in. I think it all starts with one's attitude and mentality: you can only learn as much as how you allow yourself to learn."