

First World country, First World work terms

I REFER to the letter, "Job-seekers must leave comfort zone" (*my paper*, Dec 11).

The writer mentioned that, as Singapore has moved from Third World to First, the mindsets of Singaporean workers should move **in tandem**.

Hence, Singaporeans should not take working regular hours or high pay for granted, so that they can remain competitive relative to foreign workers.

This line of argument is mistaken.

Developed countries move towards greater work-life balance and higher standards of living.

An example would be France, which has moved towards a 35-hour work week and better benefits for mothers, with four months' maternity leave.

To align our expectations of pay and work-life balance with those of foreign workers from Third World countries is for our society to move backwards.

Another example would be Australia, where labour policies dictate that employers must

show evidence that no citizen is able to fill a vacancy before a foreigner can be hired.

In addition, certain jobs which are considered by Singapore employers to be **menial**, thus leading them to hire "monkeys for peanuts" (such as pump attendants, construction workers, **plumbers**, carpenters, postmen, cleaners and sanitation workers), are considered respectable in Australia.

This is because over there, the contribution of such workers is not measured solely in monetary terms.

Menial workers in Singapore are not well-paid as many are not academically well-qualified.

Ignoring such workers' intangible contributions and rewarding them based solely on academic qualifications is unfair.

After all, if there should come a day when office workers are all stuck at home without their access to computers for a week because of some crisis, there may well be little disruption to our daily lives.

Compare this with what

would happen if no plumbers could unclog sinks and toilets for a whole week.

Also, if we insist that Singaporeans should be able to compete with foreign workers by expecting less pay, longer hours and poorer work conditions, there will definitely be citizens who cannot compete, such as mothers who cannot work long hours because of family commitments, and older workers.

If a business in a First World country is not earning enough to provide decent incomes and First World working conditions for its employees, then it is not a **sustainable** business by First World standards.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

In tandem: 串联 chuàn lián

Menial: 卑下的 bēi xià de

Plumbers: 管子工 guǎn zǐ gōng

Sustainable: 可持续的
kě chí xù de
