

Clean and green - logic fails in absolving foreign workers

I REFER to last Saturday's commentary, 'Singapore's greener, but is it cleaner?' Singaporeans pointed out that foreign workers have to shoulder part of the blame in dirtying the environment, as many are from rural areas with lower cleanliness standards. But the commentary absolved foreign workers of their guilt with the following sentence: 'But some environmentalists say it is not fair to blame foreign workers (for littering), especially when they are the ones doing most of the cleaning jobs for Singaporeans.'

This sentence contains a red herring logical fallacy. Such a fallacy is committed whenever an irrelevant topic is presented to divert attention from the original issue. The fact that a roadsweeper is a foreign worker has no causal effect on an act of littering by another foreign worker. I can use this fallacy to claim the point that 'it is not fair to blame Singaporeans for littering, since most cleaning companies are owned by Singaporeans'. Whether or not a cleaning company is headed by a Singaporean does not make it more or less likely that another Singaporean will litter.

The commentary highlighted the importance of shaping Singaporeans' social mindset to reduce filth and bring about a cleaner country. With Singapore approaching a ratio of one foreigner to every four Singaporeans, the growing presence of foreign workers cannot be ignored. In my opinion, instead of using 'diminished responsibility' on foreign workers as the commentary suggests, we have to target education efforts and punitive laws on them as well.

Wu Guanglong