

25 OCT 1999

Subject : Not letting English speaking Filipino domestic helpers drive.

Concern : This is a major Anti-Business and Anti-Expatriate Policy that will hurt the overall economy of Hong Kong.

Dear James ,

The new policy starting January 2000 of not allowing domestic helpers to drive is a serious mistake that will cause Hong Kong to lose competitiveness to other Asian cities that are more friendly to expatriate business staff. This protectionist, narrow-minded policy goes against C.H. Tung's policy speech and the whole concept of a cosmopolitan, international, business-friendly city.

English speaking expatriates require English speaking live-in domestic staff. The argument made by local unionists that allowing domestic helpers to drive is stealing high paid jobs from local Chinese drivers is absurd. It is impossible to find local drivers who speak good English that are willing to live-in with an expatriate family. Besides the basic English language and live-in problems, does anyone think that local drivers would :

1. Take the kids to school at 7:00am ?
2. Do the cooking, cleaning, ironing needed in the house when not driving ?
3. Be available at night to drive to dinners and parties so the employer can enjoy a drink or two and not be a danger to other citizens when driving his own car ?
4. Be available in the middle of the night to take the children to hospital in the event of a medical emergency when the employer is travelling out of town on business ?

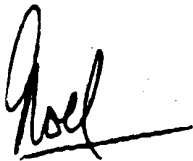
It is important to distinguish between two different driving needs : one is a driver for business needs where the driver waits throughout the business day while his employer moves around the SAR doing business and the other is for domestic needs where the domestic helper stays at home and when not doing domestic chores, does errands for the family that require driving. For business needs a local Chinese driver is best. But for live-in domestic duties, a local driver is not appropriate, and everyone knows this. Expatriate staff who have a domestic helper will not hire an additional non-English speaking Chinese driver for their limited domestic driving needs. Even if they wanted to (which they don't) and they could find such people (which they can't), domestic employers can't afford to hire an additional high wage person that must be paid for personally (companies are not going to hire at their expense a driver to help out Mrs. Jones' domestic needs).

Now what is the result of all this ? Simply put, no Chinese drivers will be hired to replace Filipino domestic helpers, so the very people this misguided policy is meant to help will in fact not be aided. And secondly and more importantly, this anti-business policy hits directly at the quality of life of expatriate families and will cause so much hardship and anger (imagine the emotions of a family having to fire a good domestic helper who has lived with them for say 10 years) that many will vote with their feet and leave Hong Kong.

Already other quality of life issues such as high pollution levels, litter, and declining level of English are causing expatriate staff with young families to question staying in or coming to Hong Kong. In many cases this domestic staff issue will be "the straw that breaks the camel's back". Goodbye to the cosmopolitan Hong Kong that is friendly and a desirable place for expatriates to come and do business.

This shortsighted policy must be rethought and changed before great, though unintended, harm is done to the long term economy of Hong Kong.

Yours truly,



Noel Thomas Patton

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