

Transition To Better Paying Jobs

Retrenchment is a word dreaded by workers but a reality in this fast paced, ever-changing, competitive global economy. While the chemical industry has performed well generally over the last couple of years, there are some sectors that are facing the constant pressure of increasing operational costs and competitive business challenges. The plastics sector is one such example. Retrenchment has taken place at some of the companies in the sector over the last two years, with some even contemplating complete closure of operations here and moving overseas.

The concern of the Chemical Industries Employees' Union is that many of their union members in some of these sunset sectors have been in their jobs for many years and possess limited skills and qualifications. While jobs are available in companies in other chemical-related sectors, the challenge is very much on job fit and skills match. The key is to re-skill these workers.

"We will keep up our efforts to get our members to constantly upgrade themselves because in today's economy, the skills they possess now may be outdated the following week. We're trying to see how we can work with our management partners to prepare and transit workers into better paying jobs," said CIEU President Rajendran s/o Govindarajoo.



The Chemical Industries Employees' Union was formed in 1981 to represent workers from the Pharmaceutical, Process & Specialty Chemical, Plastic, Glass, Ink, Paint, and Gases sectors. It currently has about 15,000 members, including about 7,500 Ordinary Branch members and another 7,500 General Branch members. CIEU targets to double its membership base to 30,000 members by 2015.



The union is knocking on the doors of these companies relentlessly to get their cooperation to work with the union on re-skilling the workers through the Singapore Workforce Development Agency's Certificate in Generic Manufacturing courses for instance. The training and upgrading will put the workers in a better position for available jobs in other sectors, if they are affected by companies restructuring.

The challenge is that sometimes these workers do not see the urgency and feel the need of such training and preparations. The onus is on the union to convince these workers that complacency may lead to the greater problem of being left out when the economy restructures.

"The union recognises that industrial renewal cannot be avoided as Singapore's economy progress. What CIEU wants to do to help the affected workers is give them all the assistance that the union can, to transit them to better paying jobs," said Mr Rajendran.

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The hard work carried out by the Chemical Industries Employees' Union behind the scenes in establishing good Labour-Management Relations has secured many companies' commitment to implement fair employment practices at their workplaces as well as the re-employment of older workers. Thirty-five companies have signed the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices Pledge. Thirty companies have given their commitments to re-employ older workers, while another 21 have either a re-employment clause in their Collective Agreements, Memorandum of Understanding or a formalised re-employment policy.