



PIGEON POST

Filipinos abroad must register as absentee voters

NOTICE

The Commission on Elections in Manila announced that all Philippine citizens abroad not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least 18 years old on election day and who wish to vote in presidential, vice presidential, senatorial and party-list representative elections on the May, 10, 2010, national elections, must file applications from overseas as absentee voters between Dec. 1 and Aug. 31 next year. The voting period will be from April 10, 2010, until 3pm on May 10, 2010. Further details are available at the Manila Economic and Cultural Office in the following cities: Taipei (02) 2508-2224, attention Aquino; Taichung (04) 2229-5901, attention Elvena; and Kaohsiung (07) 398-5935 ext. 36, attention Tango. Additional information is also available at the following Web sites: Department of Foreign Affairs (www.dfa.gov.ph) and Commission on Elections (www.comelec.gov.ph).



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BTCTO

BTCO announces scholarship winners

AWARD

The British Trade and Cultural Office (BTCO) on Aug. 21 announced the seven winners of this year's BTCO award. The scholarship recipients will all start master's courses in the UK this fall in subjects ranging from law and environmental policy to finance and fashion industry management. The one-year scholarships will provide up to \$12,000 (US\$22,000) for tuition. This year, the BTCO will offer a joint scholarship with the Delta Electronic Foundation specifically targeted at those who plan to make a contribution to tackling climate change and other environmental issues. The BTCO scholarship is awarded annually and is unique in that it looks for potential future leaders who can use their influence and standing to benefit Taiwan. Applicants are selected on both their academic strength and their commitment and ambition to make a difference upon their return. The scholarship is operated by the BTCO and administered by the British Council. A scheme for academics starting in the fall this year will be launched this month. More information is available on the BTCO Web site at ukintaiwan.fco.gov.uk/en/ or the British Council's Web site at www.britishcouncil.org.tw.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Linda Arrigo: A permanent voice

LIVING HISTORY: Arrigo is from a generation of expats that made a difference to Taiwan's future. Society today may have moved on, but for her there is still work to do

BY RICHARD HAZELDINE
STAFF REPORTER

When it comes to the foreign community in Taiwan, not many individuals are as well known as Linda Gail Arrigo (艾琳達).

Arrigo has been in Taiwan on and off for more than four decades since first arriving as a 14-year-old in the early 1960s. She is instantly recognizable to a generation of middle-aged Taiwanese as the ex-wife of former political prisoner Shih Ming-teh (施明德), and as one of the dozens of foreigners who helped Taiwanese in their struggle for democracy and human rights against the martial law-era Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) regime.

Becoming a human rights activist might seem an unusual path for the daughter of a US army major, but Arrigo says it was her father's military connections that enabled her to come to Taiwan in the first place.

Retired from service, he returned here using military transport to be with his Chinese girlfriend — with young Linda in tow.

As well as being the last bastion of dictator Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) "Free China," Taiwan at that time was also one of the major recreational destinations for US troops in Vietnam, and this brought a curious and impressionable Arrigo up close and personal with the grim reality of US foreign policy. This, along with her first-hand experience of the repressive nature of the Chiang regime, gave rise to rebellious feelings.

Attending Taipei American School, with its classes full of "military brats" and spending time with the cream of the privileged Chinese class — seeing "how they treated or viewed the local population" — further fueled Arrigo's opposition to injustice in her adopted homeland, she says.

Marrying "a native Taiwanese" in 1968, she returned to the US, where she learned more about Taiwan's history and the gruesome truth of the White Terror through books and meetings with dissidents and Taiwanese-Americans

fighting for freedom and justice.

It wasn't until she returned in 1975 to begin fieldwork on Taiwanese factory girls for her doctorate in sociology, however, that she became deeply involved in the fledgling human rights movement, swept along by a circle of new friends and acquaintances.

Asked what she rates as her greatest single achievement during her decades here, Arrigo says her "most important role was at the time of *Formosa* magazine," a dissident publication, and during the aftermath of the 1979 Kaohsiung Incident. In the first half of 1980, her work helped to focus attention on the situation in Taiwan and pressure the government into throwing the trials of those arrested open to international scrutiny.

This "kept people from being executed and changed the course of Taiwan's political development," she says.

But her life was not as romantic as it sounds. She does have regrets, the major one being that "I definitely did neglect my son, from an early age," when she left him behind in the US with his father, her first husband, to become a full-time activist.

"When one enters into a struggle like this it is really overpowering," she says.

But despite the damage done to her family, despite the fact that she has never been "economically well-off" and notwithstanding the lack of a personal life and career opportunities in her life-long involvement in Taiwan's democratic movement, she still looks back on that period with a sense of satisfaction, saying that it was a "rare privilege to be a part of such an historic process."

Once heavily involved with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Taiwanese independence circles, Arrigo has now left all that behind, saying she became "jaded" and "bored" with the battle between independence and unification, which she believes is driven entirely by economic forces.

Her honesty also made her unpopular in DPP circles after she published an expose of its murky



Linda Gail Arrigo and ex-husband Shih Ming-teh are shown in their wedding photo taken on Oct. 15, 1978. Lei Chen, right, (editor of *Free China*, jailed 1960 to 1970), was their marriage certifier. PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA GAIL ARRIGO

“ [Opening the trials]

kept people from being executed and changed the course of Taiwan's political development. ”

— Linda Gail Arrigo, democracy activist and longtime Taiwan resident



PHOTO: RICHARD HAZELDINE, TAIPEI TIMES

financial dealings based on information she and some colleagues discovered during their time working for the party.

Once close friends have now become distant, she says, as they are reluctant to share confidential information with her. Her disappointment with former husband Shih is also apparent, particularly following his involvement in the campaign to depose former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) a couple of years ago. Arrigo calls Shih a "washout, traitor and betrayer."

Despite her disappointments, Arrigo is most enthusiastic about human rights and historical research, although with a full-time lecturing job, she now sees her main role these days as one of collecting and

documenting precious personal accounts of human suffering during the White Terror era in an attempt to educate younger generations — so many of whom know little or nothing about this important and tragic period.

Part of her work includes taking her university classes on tours of several White Terror grave sites discovered in Taipei's public cemeteries around 15 years ago. Exposure to the physical remnants of that era helps give her students a grounding of the nation's tragic history.

Arrigo and another stalwart of the Taiwanese human rights movement, Lynn Miles, recently released the book *A Borrowed Voice*, which details the efforts of those who

worked to publicize the human rights abuses committed by the KMT government between 1960 and 1980.

In the small amount of free time that she has, Arrigo says she likes nothing more than escaping from the concrete jungle to the tree-covered hills near her apartment in Taipei County's Shenkeng Township (深坑), more famous for its "Tofu Street."

But even then she finds it hard to stay out of the limelight, as "Linda Road," a walking trail that she personally hacked out of an old farmer's path in the hills near her house several years ago, has achieved semi-cult status, with several Web pages dedicated to it and the name now spray-painted on a wall near the entrance to the trail.

As to the future, Arrigo says she is not one to get homesick, and has no plans to return to the US. Being part of Taiwan's history makes her feel right at home here.

Besides, she enjoys watching what she calls the "soap opera" of Taiwanese politics far too much to leave — even more so, one presumes, now that she is no longer part of it.

Peter O'Neill: A father and a friend for migrant workers

HARD LABOR: Reverend Peter O'Neill has spent a great deal of his 17 years in Taiwan providing concrete solutions to the many overseas laborers who suffer exploitation

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Growing up in a small, homogeneous town near Geelong in the southeastern Australian state of Victoria, the red-headed Reverend Peter O'Neill never thought he would be fighting for the rights of migrant workers in Taiwan four decades later.

Sitting in the small, humble meeting room of the Hsinchu Catholic Diocese Migrants and New Immigrants Service Center, the tall clergyman, better known as Father Peter, dressed in polo shirt and khaki pants, spoke in a soft but passionate voice about the injustice of the labor broker system, a problem that he has tried to address for much of his 17 years in Taiwan.

"The broker system in Taiwan ... well, stinks," he said. "It is completely unfair how much they are charging the people."

For example, he said, while the Thai government only requires its workers to pay a NT\$48,000 placement fee to brokers, workers are required by Thai brokers themselves to pay anywhere between NT\$120,000 and NT\$140,000.

Although the Philippine government sets the placement fee at NT\$28,000, brokers are charging at least NT\$90,000. The Vietnamese government does not have a set placement fee structure, but brokers there are asking for up to US\$7,000.

"And that's just the money to leave their countries. Once the workers get here, they also have to pay a monthly fee of NT\$1,500 to the Taiwanese brokers as required by the Taiwanese government. After deducting room and board fees,

labor and health insurance and other expenses, the workers are often left with very little money to save up."

Some workers, before leaving their homelands, are asked to sign a contract stating that if they default on monthly payments or fail to clear debts within an agreed period, labor brokers have the right to take over their families' houses and land, he said.

Worse still, he said, some workers face a double whammy when the Taiwanese employers coerce them

into performing illegal jobs, refuse to pay for overtime or demand that the workers perform jobs in the "3D" category — dirty, dangerous and difficult — that are not part of their contract.

The situation at times escalates into physical, mental and even sexual abuse if workers do not comply with the employers' demands, he said.

However, O'Neill acknowledged that the situation in Taiwan is not entirely bleak, because there are many good and fair employers who treat their workers in a dignified and humane manner.

"But nine out of 10 people who walk into the center [have] a genuine story of abuse or exploitation," he said.

"Many people leave here with a broken 'Taiwan Dream,'" O'Neill said, but pointed out that others capitalize on learning the value of saving and setting practical goals, and thus are able to forge a better life for themselves after returning home.

O'Neill recalled the story of Elsa Villamora, a former caretaker-turned-entrepreneur and the general manager of a lucrative rice mill

“ But nine out of 10 people who walk into the center [have] a genuine story of abuse or exploitation. ”

— Peter O'Neill, Reverend at the Hsinchu Catholic Diocese

in the Philippine town of Matinao, Surigao del Norte Province.

The mill was opened by four Filipino migrant workers, two of whom worked in Taiwan and two in Korea. With the help of O'Neill and his fellow St. Columban missionaries, the four pooled their assets, a total of 900,000 pesos to purchase the mill.

After 11 years, the mill is now a 5 million peso (US\$108,000) enterprise and employs 50 former migrant workers, including 25 who returned from Taiwan. Villamora is also a regular guest speaker on the international labor NGO circuit, where she inspires others with her rags-to-riches story.

While in Taiwan, Villamora was one of the participants in the Migrant Savings for Alternative Investment program started by O'Neill and other migrant labor advocates.

"The goal [of the program] is to help the migrant workers to understand the difference between what they want versus what they need and how to use their money wisely. They need to ask themselves questions like: 'Do I need a new cellphone or do I just want a new cellphone?'" O'Neill said. "We



Father Peter O'Neill, right, stands with Indonesian caregiver Hendrawati, center, during a protest organized by the Migrants Empowerment Network in Taiwan in front of the Council of Labor Affairs in 2004. Hendrawati's Taiwanese employer allegedly breached her contract by paying her in rupiah instead of New Taiwan dollars. The Hope Workers Center helped her to recover three years of unpaid salary. PHOTO COURTESY OF HOPE WORKERS CENTER

help them to set practical goals, especially help them to see what kind of life they want their families to have after they return to their countries."

The center's counselors, who speak Mandarin, Thai, Tagalog, English and Indonesian, help workers learn how to decipher their pay stubs, understand their rights as migrant workers and be savvy with their finances.

"We cannot fight the battle for the migrant workers. They need to know how to stand up for themselves. We are here to empower them with the skills they need," said O'Neill, pointing at various Legal

Aid Foundation and government brochures on the shelves behind him.

In addition to money management know-how, migrant workers are also welcome to visit the center to develop computer literacy in a course taught by a Filipino migrant professional, O'Neill said.

The day after speaking to the *Taipei Times*, O'Neill was to travel to Taipei to collect 50 computers donated to the center by the Taipei American School.

O'Neill said that because Taiwan is not in the UN, it is not constrained by UN protocols or the regulations of the International

Labor Organization. The only international framework that can influence Taiwan, he said, is the US State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons* report, to which he contributes each year in collaboration with the American Institute in Taiwan.

"The situation in Taiwan is improving, but it can definitely do better," he said. "In my prayers at night, I ask God to grant me the patience and the compassion I need [to carry on the work] ... and to remember it is not the Taiwanese people [who are at fault], it is just some of the Taiwanese employers that are mistreating the workers."

Polish exchange students go home full of memories

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Twenty-four Polish students who concluded a month-long Mandarin study camp at I-Shou University in Kaohsiung County last Wednesday said they hoped to return to Taiwan.

The study camp, organized by the university's Chinese Language Center and Polish teachers tasked with promoting Chinese culture in their country, offered a wide variety of courses, including Mandarin, Chinese festivals, calligraphy, divination, seal-carving, appreciation of classical Chinese string music, *qigong*, Chinese opera and meditation.

The students expressed particular interest in the art of carving personal seals and curiosity about local folk practices such as burning incense.

Magdalena Senderowska, who studies at the Warsaw University of Economics, said that when she watched Taiwanese praying, it seemed to her that it was a very good method of relieving stress.

"The dazzling sunlight and clean shining sand beaches at Kenting in the southernmost county of Pingtung were also unforgettable," she said.



A Polish student poses as the Ji Gong Buddhist deity. PHOTO: FANG CHIH-HSIEN, TAIPEI TIMES