

香港浸會大學教職員工會
Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty and Staff Union

團結 • Solidarity 自主 • Autonomy 公義 • Justice

NEWSLETTER (142)

**Can the house of harmony be built on the sand of lies and
oppression of the weak?**

March 7, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

We have received recently a letter from Ms. April Ma, who requests us to distribute an open letter that she wrote to all the colleagues in the University. We hereby attached the letter for your reference.

Yours faithfully,

Executive Committee,
Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty and Staff Union.

Dear friends of Hong Kong Baptist University,

How are you? My name is April Ma Siu-ying.

I was a student in the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist College from 1978 to 1981. (At that time, Hong Kong Baptist College was a private Christian college.) In the year of 1981, I transferred my study to the United States. When I was studying in the United States, I met many devoted and faithful Christians who are members of the Baptist denomination. After I returned to Hong Kong in 1984, I transferred my church membership to the Kowloon Tong English Baptist Church which is right next to the Hong Kong Baptist College. During those years, there were many missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention working at Baptist College and were members of that church. They all are my friends at church whom I respected. During the years of 1995 to 1998, I had been part-time and full-time lecturer in the School of Continue Education of Baptist University. For many years, I have had a deep emotional bondage and relationship with Baptist University.

My husband Lau Sing changed his job from The Chinese University of Hong Kong to Hong Kong Baptist College 15 years ago. He was employed by Baptist College as department head of the department of Education Studies and established the Centre for Child Development in 1991. During his term of office as department head, all departments in Baptist College were working earnestly towards accreditation. All staff in different departments worked hard day and night. Although the work was exhausting, the relationship among the staff and the mood on campus was close and warm. Gradually, Hong Kong Baptist College changed its status from a private Christian college to a government funded university and the name changed to Hong Kong Baptist University.

In recent years, because of budget cut by the government, the administration of Baptist University had requested the staff to sign consent form for salary cut according to the percentage of the salary: staff with high salary would have higher cut and staff with low salary would have lower cut. My husband had signed each consent form in support of the University.

For the change into NPRS last year, the condition for my husband is the same as other academic staff, there is no individual loss. Salary and benefit will remain the same. Even there is a possibility that the University may cut its contribution to the superannual fund after 3 years, but by that time my husband will have already reached his retirement age. Therefore, my husband's salary and benefit are not affected by the NPRS. Then, why do he and the other five academic staff insist on not signing the consent form even when they were being threatened to be dismissed?

Please allow me to reaffirm our statement: We agree with a performance based reward system, we support the university administration to use public resources effectively; what we against is “black box operation”, “fat on the top, thin on the bottom” ; in order to enhance a performance based culture, the evaluation system needs to include bottom-up evaluation, starting from the bottom levels evaluating how the management is performing, including the PVC, Vice-Presidents, Deans, and Heads of Departments. And the results of such evaluations should be publicly announced.

In this incident of coercing staff to join NPRS, we see the dictatorial and untruthful operation of the BU administration. For example, until now the administration still tell outsiders that 99.6% of staff joined NPRS voluntarily, and also say that the two dismissed staff chose to leave the job by themselves. The fact is more than 200 staff did not want to accept NPRS for a long time. These staff had authorized the Union to negotiate with the administration but the administration had shown no concern all the time. Many of them signed to join NPRS unwillingly at the last minutes because of the policy of “not signing consent letter will be dismissed”.

The NPRS started to operate in Baptist University from January 1, 2006. However, in the mean time, staff of some faculties and departments were already receiving bonus according to the percentage of their salary around Chinese New Year. Staff with higher salary would receive more money as bonus and staff with lower salary would receive less money. Although the personnel office has now clarified that the “bonus” is “special allowance”, but the administration had never made it clear that they were based on what reasons to give this “special allowance.” Even the staff who received this “special allowance” were not sure about why they received it. Isn't this what we have been worry about the problems of “black box operation”, “fat on the top, thin on the bottom” of NPRS? How can the administration claimed that this is a direct connection between reward and performance? And what kind of “flexible” management is this?! How “effective” is this use of public resources?!

Within the past two months, I took the initiative to listen to BU staff at different levels in order to understand the truth behind the dispute of dismissal. Then I understood why they either are silent or they keep their identity hidden. I would like to tell you, if you have never been coerced because of holding a different view from the administration, you are very lucky. It is because many of the BU staff told me that they are disappointed, disheartened and saddened by being bullied. They all expressed that it is useless to strive for and the administration will not change. Many of them told me that they are planning to quit their job in two to three years or they are only doing their job at BU on a day to day basis. I was shocked by their disheartened feeling. How would this brain drain that may appear at BU within these two to three years affect the university education? Does the administration truly believe that these staff are threatened by the reward being connected directly to work performance policy and all of these disheartened staff are staff of no work performance?

Why a small number of high paid administrators can use “abide by the spirit of contract” as reason in about more than a year ago to hire out sourced cleaners by using a salary (HK\$3800) way below the government proposed minimum wage? After this incident was exposed by the Labor Unions, the BU administration still insisted to “abide by the spirit of contract” and did not follow the other Universities to adjust the wages of the cleaners to the minimum wage as proposed by the Government. Until last July, only after new bidding of the cleaner contract, then the administration adjust the cleaner’s wages to the minimum wage as proposed by the Government. What a university administration that was so keen on “abide by the spirit of contract” at the same time is using any possible means to destroy the spirit of contract in order to compel staff over to a so-called “New Pay and Reward Structure” today?!

Jesus teaches us to be the light and salt in this world. (Matthew 5:13: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?”) Besides being used for flavoring, salt is also used as preservatives. When put on the wound, salt can cause pain but has a curing effect. Jesus wants Christians to be the preservatives of the world. Christians need to have the courage to speak up against immorality and be the conscience of the society.

I do not have the authority and power as Christ to clean the Temple of God, but my husband and I are introspecting each day whether we are Pharisees and teachers of the law in the Bible who sent Christ to the Cross because of our acquired interest in society? Or are we really following the footsteps of the Lord? To me, the most distressing is in seeing many people use the name of Christ but carrying out injustice in society.

In the past two years, the BU Union has tried very hard to communicate with the BU administration in hope of working out a new structure that is truly beneficial to BU. However, the administration willfully ignored their opinion and used dismissal to coerce staff. Since there is no channel for the staff to appeal in the University, they can only go to the Legislative Council. If the staff takes the case of unreasonable dismissal to the court, the administration can use office hours and public money but the staff can only use money in their own pocket and sacrifice their own sleeping time! The one who will gain most benefit from these lawsuits may be the chairman of the Council whose law firm is a legal representative of BU.

What BU uses is taxpayer's public money; certainly the public has the right to care about how the money is being used. However, even having received serious condemnation from the Legislative Council and more than twenty public groups, the BU administration is still distorting the facts and reasons. **We are afraid that silence will be interpreted as approving their lies.** Please allow me to quote one of the BU staff's speech in the LegCo hearing: "All the time, all of us remember closely that we are accepting the public money in work. We do not want to use our working hours to fight against the administration. The two words "fighting against" are words given by the administration to the Union. That has never been our intention. We composed our writing after we returned home from work. In fact, we take upon ourselves many roles at home, we have to look after children, prepare dinner, but we cannot stop responding because much information passed out by the administration is not true."

The one who destroys the reputation of BU is the administration that has done wrong but refused to admit. The result of the development of the issue at present is caused by the senior administrators in ignoring justice and distorting facts. The responsibility should not be that of the staff and students who have stood out and insisted on telling the truth and revealing justice.

Today I can write this letter with my real name is because I am not a staff of BU at present. I need not be afraid that I would be coerced or punished because of expressing different views from my supervisor or the administration.

I sincerely pray that the campus will soon return to quietude and harmony.

After all people are being silenced, the campus may return to quietude. On the sand of lies and oppression of the weak, there may be superficial harmony, and acceleration of blood and sweat of the weak lower-rank staff.

But true harmony cannot be built on the sand of lies and oppression of the weak.*

May peace be with you.

April Ma Siu-ying

March 5, 2006

Please refer to Matthew 7:24-27 in the New Testament for reference of Jesus' parable of building the house on rock vs. building the house on sand.

Matt 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matt 7:25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Matt 7:26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Matt 7:27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”