

August 22, 2010

Mr. James Turk  
Executive Director  
Canadian Association of University Teachers  
2705 Queensview Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K2B 8K2

Dear Mr. Turk,

Thank you for your reply (below). I know you are making every effort to find a way to assist me in this complicated case, but I don't think you are sufficiently aware of the implications of this case for equity for women. Along with other women colleagues, I have been concerned about the downgrading by CAUT of its women's committee. Many of us feel that CAUT, like many of our faculty associations, is content to make general statements in support of equity, but doesn't provide us assistance when we need it, as if empty words could replace meaningful actions.

I am again requesting CAUT to undertake an inquiry into my non-renewal as Joint Chair of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University.

While, as you say, CAUT has no legal relationship with employers, and member associations are in the best position to protect individual academic staff members' rights, this has not prevented CAUT from undertaking investigations into the treatment that individual professors have received at the hands of university administrations.

I take as most recent examples, the CAUT investigation into the non-renewal of Dr. Larry Reynolds as Department Head at the University of Manitoba, which found in favour of Dr. Reynolds, and the current CAUT inquiry into the non-renewal of Professor Ramesh Thakur as Director of the Balsillie School of International Affairs at Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier universities.

I would like to point out that my non-renewal as Joint Chair of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University has close parallels with both these cases.

All three cases involve lack of due process and fundamental issues of academic freedom.

Furthermore, like Dr. Reynolds', my position involved two 'employers' and I was subjected to the same kinds of coercive tactics used against him, as found by the CAUT inquiry, to resign or not request a renewal.

As in Professor Thakur's case, my non-renewal appears directly related to my substantive criticism of governance structures and my desire to protect the independence of the Joint Chair.

The Joint Chair was created in 1985, as one of five Women's Studies Chairs established across Canada by a grant from the Secretariat of State. It has been in difficulty for over ten years, and since the late 1990s has been without an incumbent half the time.

York University Dean Bob Drummond accepted to loan me to the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, on favourable financial terms, for the duration of my appointment, which was renewable.

At the time of my interview, when informed that improving the endowment was a key concern, I indicated to the Administrative Committee of the Joint Chair that I felt the infra-structures (web-site, publication of activities and research, outreach email lists, etc.) and the general visibility of the Joint Chair would need to be improved to develop a successful fund-raising campaign. The Administrative Committee of the Joint Chair gave me a mandate to work to raise funds for the Chair and this was a key part of the functions assigned to me in my contract.

In the first three weeks of my tenure, to prepare a fund-raising campaign, I met with the Development Office at the University of Ottawa, and undertook a review of the administrative structure and records of the Joint Chair. As a result of what I found, I raised several fundamental questions about the governance of the Joint Chair with the Administrative Committee by email.

I questioned, for instance, the decision to maintain a full-time administrator for the Joint Chair, when there were not enough funds in the endowment to maintain an incumbent faculty member or women's activist in the Joint Chair. I pointed out that there were very poor records on what research or out-reach activities had been undertaken under the budget of the Joint Chair, particularly for the years when there was no incumbent, that the administrative structures of the Joint Chair were lacking in transparency, and that there were numerous contradictions between the job description of the Administrator and that of the Joint Chair.

Although my emails to the Administrative Committee were confidential, the Administrator of the Joint Chair then filed a complaint against me at the University of Ottawa.

I think it is fair to say that in the two meetings I was called to first with Carleton Dean John Osborne on July 23, 2009 and then, on July 27, 2009, with Dean Osborne, and Interim Dean Catherine Lee at the University of Ottawa, along with the two directors of the Women's Studies Institutes, no substantiation for the Administrator's complaint was presented, and I was subjected to intimidation and discrediting tactics aimed at 'encouraging' me to resign.

As I did not voluntarily resign, it would appear, from an email I received from Carleton Dean John Osborne on July 23, 2009, that the decision not to renew my contract was made at that time, three weeks after my appointment, and was directly connected to my substantive criticism of the governance of the Joint

Chair.

I subsequently expressed my concerns about the governance of the Joint Chair to both Carleton Vice-President Peter Ricketts and University of Ottawa Vice-President François Houle. In response, my initial contract and duties were unilaterally re-written in a letter of 'clarification' sent October 15, 2009 by Vice-President Houle. Any duties that would justify my continued review of the governance structures were removed. I was not allowed to communicate directly with the Administrative Committee and I was placed in a subordinate reporting position to the Directors of the two Institutes of Women's Studies for the approval of my outreach and research activities, thus restricting my academic freedom of the Joint Chair.

A climate of discredit of my work was set in place, as witnessed by several emails Dean Osborne sent to me throughout the year.

When I exercised my entitlement under the original announcement of the Joint Chair position, and requested the renewal of my appointment, as in Dr Reynolds' and Professor Thakur's case, no due process for the evaluation of my work was provided.

As I have pointed out, my case raises important questions about the academic independence of one of the few Chairs specifically designated for Women's Studies in Canada, in a context where women remain seriously under-represented in Canadian Research Chairs.

I note that CAUT "provides legal advice to academic staff associations on employment-related matters and we take on major precedent-setting cases. Our lawyers monitor legislative initiatives and intervene in court cases of significance for academic staff."

My case raises important questions about the exercise of academic freedom by the holders of Research Chairs. It raises essential questions about the legal entitlements of faculty members on loan from one university to another to take up a Research Chair, and about employer accountability to collective agreement rights in such situations.

The protection of academic freedom always starts with an individual case. It is through its ability to intervene to protect academic freedom when individual faculty members are being subjected to undue pressures that CAUT remains a valuable presence for protecting academic freedom for all faculty members across Canada.

As in the cases of Dr. Reynolds and Professor Thakur, which CAUT has accepted to investigate, it would appear that my non-renewal was directly related to my exercise of my right to academic freedom, my right to raise substantive criticisms of governance or operational structures to enhance the transparency and well-being of the Joint Chair, and my right to choose my research and outreach activities without undue interference by the university, rights that I exercised with a view to making a positive contribution to the broader

university community and the advancement of women's rights within (and without)the academe.

I look forward to a positive response from CAUT and hope to see a greater sensitivity to women's equity issues.

Sincerely,

Agnes Whitfield, Ph.D.  
President, Academic Women for Justice  
Professor, Department of English  
208 Stong College  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M3J 1P3  
Telephone: 416 736-5166  
Fax: 416 736 5412  
Email: [agnesw@yorku.ca](mailto:agnesw@yorku.ca)