

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I think information is power. That is without question. At the same time, a little information in the wrong hands can be very dangerous. On television, these days, one sees some pretty stupid community service announcements. They are laughable, actually. There is one, in particular, that I find the most ridiculous of all. It relates to alleged offensive programming on television. One is shown an elderly gentleman, looking incredulously at something on television, while his wife tries to put her hand over his eyes so that her (presumed) husband will not be offended by the images on the television. This is crazy! If one assumes that the elderly gentleman is looking at a naked lady, for what reason would he be offended or corrupted by the image(s)? If anything, he might well be sexually wound up – and he wife may be the lucky recipient of his supercharged libido. One is informed that if something on television is deemed to have been offensive, one ought to write to a certain department of the Hongkong Government with the date, the time, the complaint, a description of the offensive material, etc, etc, etc.*

*Then, there is the community service announcement, relating to employment. This announcement gives assistance, allegedly, to employees who have a grievance against their employers. The trouble, as I see it, about this announcement is that it gives only a very small amount of information – and this, as I have already stated, can be very dangerous in the wrong hands. For instance, it states, among other things, that if an employer does not pay an employee that which is due to the employee within 7 days from the date that an employee should have been paid, the employee has the right to file a complaint in The Labour Department. This information is, by itself, quite correct, of course, however, it does not follow that, for every grievance, valid or invalid, an employee should toddle down to The Labour Department to file a complaint. Many employees, I have been told, are, today, threatening their employers with, 'I'll sue the Hell out of you if you do not do this or that!' This is no joke, My Dear Grandchild, because Bo-Bo told me of just such a situation. What happened was that a little girl, a very junior clerk, resigned from her job, giving a letter of resignation, stating that 30 days hence, she will be leaving the company. Fair enough! There was a small mistake in the letter of resignation, however, in that the one-month's notice should have ended on a certain date, not one day later. Bo-Bo's head of the Human Resources Division of the company pointed this out to the former employee who yelled out: 'You pay me the extra day or I'll file a complaint with The Labour Department!' This little clerk was not willing to listen to reason, claiming that she had watched television and knew the law as it relates to employees. Employers, for the most part, want a happy workforce, but some of the community service announcements, as they stand, today, are, if anything, festering antagonism between employees and employers.*

*Then, there are those public service announcements, featuring the good works of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). In these public service announcements, one is informed that, if one believes that a crime has been committed, pick up the telephone and tell the ICAC, immediately: 'Keep our City Clean! Stamp out corruption!' I like the idea of a clean city, but many people, I have been told, take these public service announcements to the extreme and look askance at every suggestion of a business proposal. Bo-Bo, whose company is, also, in the transportation business– when he is not sitting in his very high position as the head of the street-sweeping department of a town in Guangdong – is afraid that if he were to suggest to his Board of Directors a method whereby a business transaction could be shunted through one of the company's offshore companies, it might be viewed as being contrary to some law about which he is not acquainted. In business, you must understand, avoidance, not evasion, of paying tax to the Hongkong Government is a must for any business person, worth his/her salt. Only a fool pays more taxes*

*than he is supposed to pay. So, if a prospective business partner of Bo-Bo is suspicious of my froglike husband's suggestion of using an offshore company to consummate a business arrangement, it could come to mean that there will be an investigation by the ICAC into Bo-Bo's activities – for no apparent reason.*

*Then, there is that community service announcement which tells employees that, if they think that their employers are using pirated, computer software, they should inform the relevant Hongkong Government authority. So, you can imagine, My Dear Grandchild, that the effects of this community service announcement could come to mean that it teaches employees to become spies within their companies. I am not suggesting that companies steal computer software from licensed vendors, far from it, but how would an employee be able to recognise pirated, computer software from computer software, the licence of which has been paid by a company? Again, one can imagine what is likely to happen in a company where an employee, for any number of reasons, is unhappy with his/her/its lot: Telephone the relevant Hongkong Government Authority to make a report!*

*One recalls Germany, just prior to the outbreak of World War II, when young children were indoctrinated into the idea of reporting what their parents were doing and saying. Hongkong must be careful because, in the words of Lord Acton (1834-1902): 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' It is said that a cock has great influence on his own dunghill. I remember that, during the Cultural Revolution in China, the Government was, also, encouraging people to make reports about anybody, including parents and relatives and, even friends, anybody, in fact, who was thought not to be loyal to China and the doctrines of Chairman Mao Tse Tung. Is that the correct direction for Hongkong in the years to come?*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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