

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I do not understand this fracas about the new employees of the Hongkong Government. What are they called again: Undersecretaries? Learning minions? Petty (or pretty) Overlords/Underlords? As far as I can determine, if I want to employ somebody and to pay that person a little bit over the top, that is my business. The Hongkong Government, led, on occasions, by Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen (), is entitled to employ anybody that it deems qualified for a certain position and to pay a person whatever it determines is appropriate. In the free-market economy of Hongkong, if one interviews an applicant for a position and that person states that he or she would accept the position at a certain salary, well, that's it. The employer either agrees or disagrees with the demand of the prospective labourer. I talked this over with my dear froglike husband, Bo-Bo, and, for a change, he said that I am totally correct. Bo-Bo is paid more than \$HK1 million a month, just to look out of windows, you know, and to come up with ideas which he demands that his minions execute. I am happy to state that, notwithstanding a little problem in England, some years ago, when the family owned shipping company nearly went to the wall and had to be bailed out by the Chinese Government with buckets of cash, Bo-Bo has made very few mistakes in his business determinations. Of course, at the same time, he has not made many decisions, during the past decade – which is, probably, just as well, considering his advanced years and the fact that he is quite forgetful, these days. Anyway, coming back to the matter at hand, according to The Frog, companies are not democracies and, to quote US President Harry S. Truman: 'The buck stops here' ... with the boss. The cost of labour is determined by the going rate. Of course, people are greedy, that goes without saying, but one has to pay the going rate. As The Frog, constantly, repeats the trite expression: 'If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.' It's true, though. Give an employee a good income and he will treasure his position. Working for the Hongkong Government is, after all, working at Hongkong's iron rice bowl, so a 26-year old man, fresh out of school with little to no experience in anything (other than chasing women), will treasure his job in the Hongkong Government where there is security, housing benefits, medical benefits, retirement benefits, lots of paid holidays, a 6-hour working day – 30 hours per week – and where there is no single boss who can say: 'You're fired!' God! If I had a son, fresh out of secondary school, who was not mentally equipped to go to university, I would pick up the telephone and talk to my Catholic Chief Executive and say: 'Look here, Donald, I have an 18 year-old son, how about giving him a job as a Chief Undersecretary of something or other in Government? He's a good kid and he will never talk back and knows how to keep his trap shut tightly.'*

*With the hundreds of billions of dollars that the Hongkong Government has in its coffers, today, it would never miss a few tens of millions of dollars that it will be paying out to the latest, new Government employees, minions who will carry out the bidding of the Hongkong Government, according to orders, without a 'By your leave, Sir'. So, what is all the fuss about with employment of these new people? These minions are, exactly, what the doctor ordered because, among other things, they will never stir the pot too quickly or make any complaints to anybody. Which is just ducky, isn't it? At the same time, in the event that they make mistakes, those mistakes will be their's and not the Government's. Further, it will be very easy to find replacements for these brightly coloured Government bugs – because they are being paid so handsomely ... for the learning the ropes. As for the matter of divulging their salaries and emoluments to the*

*world, I agree with them: It is nobody's business but their's – and The Chief Executive's. I put it to The Frog along the lines that, if I went to a wet market in order to buy a fresh garoupa and the fishmonger said that, normally, she charges \$HK80 per tael for this luxury fish, but, because I am married to The Frog, she will give me a 30-percent discount, provided that I did not tell anybody about the special price, I would be duty bound to keep the price a secret. There is absolutely nothing wrong with getting a secret discount on the basis of the concept of willing buyer and willing seller. When the new Underlords/Overlords were interviewed about the possibility of working for the Hongkong Government, I am certain that they were told to keep the matter quiet until the appropriate time and that would have included the details of their take-home pay. The Hongkong Government made the offer of employment and these lucky people accepted the invitation to be servants of the people of Hongkong. I think that there must be a number of very envious people in Hongkong, who did not get the chance to work for the iron rice bowl of Hongkong. Green has never been a very attractive colour, anyway.*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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