

Asian Students Association (ASA) Speech for Legislative Council Meeting on Education Budget Cut

Present by Lee Khai Loon on December 1, 2003

The tuition in Hong Kong universities is already extremely high. With university administrations standing side by side the students and their teachers, the struggle for sufficient funding or resources intensifies.

Indeed, with an education budget cut, the one of the possible resolutions for administrations is to increase tuition once again. Matching fund comes from this mantra – whence the students and their parents have to share the burden in running supposedly state-run and -funded educational institutions.

Education and Man Power Department Head Arthur Li guaranteed that the budget cut will not affect the quality of education. However, this kind of guarantee is not convincing at all as we refer similar situations in Australia and New Zealand after their respective governments imposed education budget cuts.

These are some of these seemingly harmless effects: One university cuts an entire department. Another sacks one hundred staff. One closed down libraries while another introduced all sorts of technically illegal fees on various services. Radical changes made by the administration were on the university itself, the curriculum, the faculty, the students.

Who then takes the burden? Will the students have any assurance of no tuition hike in the next five to ten years? Who can guarantee that university will not cut down on its administrative and maintenance costs? How safe and secure are the salaries and jobs of teachers and non-teaching personnel? How can Li assure us of a mass-oriented, scientific and quality education?

If a student cannot afford to pay tuition any longer, soon there will be nothing left in the universities. It will simply become a stock market where education becomes a share holding held under gripes of speculative investment.

We oppose whatever education budget cut or any efforts to make the education sector a business/market-driven sector just like all the others, with universities able to charge what they like for degrees and the government washing its hands of any equity and access (or even quality of education) issues.

We firmly believe that education should be based on need and not the ability to pay. The provision of basic social services such as free education is basic human rights; these are not commodities. We recognize education as a public good, which has intrinsic value. Education should promote full integral human development, care and concern for fellow human beings and the environment.

We affirm the fundamental responsibility of government to fully fund a people based educational system that includes free meaningful education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and to make primary and secondary education compulsory.