

“I won’t accept being treated as a criminal”

After 31 years as a teacher in arts education his work contract was promptly terminated.

Albert Braun wants to tell his story in order to give students, colleagues and others an explanation why he disappeared.

JAKOBSTAD/PIETARSAARI. When there is an argument, both sides should be heard/There are always two sides to a story, Albert Braun says. He has expressed his willingness to negotiate and compromise, but he feels that his employer does not share his interest in reaching a settlement. Consequently, he sees no other way forward than to try the termination of his work contract in court.

In early autumn last year Albert Braun started to investigate the possibilities of applying for job alternation leave. He strongly needed an extended period away from work to sort out some private matters.

– I really had to be in Germany and felt that dealing with these pressing issues and working at the same time was too heavy a burden right then. But it turned out I couldn’t apply for job alternation leave since I didn’t have enough work time in my work plan. You need to work 75 % of full time in order to be able to apply for that kind of sabbatical. I worked 70 % because of cutbacks.

Naturally, he understands that rules must be followed, but, he argues, the 5 % that were missing could easily have been compensated for.

– It is a bit difficult for me to accept the lack of interest and the unwillingness to look for a long-term solution. My experience, during my many years in arts education, is that there has usually been an openness to trying different ways in order to find the best solution for the students. Every one of us in the arts programme has worked many more hours than we are paid for, simply because we are passionate about what we do.

Braun mentions that he and his colleagues devote many extra hours for instance to the Rusk festival and different exhibitions and projects without demanding any pay.

– When, for example, we arrange or visit exhibitions abroad we often apply for external funding. We work a lot more than eight hours per day. I’ve always taken for granted that these trips should include networking and establishing new contacts.

IN NOVEMBER Albert Braun left for a stay as artist-in-residence in Virginia in the United States. In his opinion, he had taken care of all his teaching duties for the autumn and made all the necessary preparations at school. When he landed and opened his e-mail, he found a message from his employer. The unit manager wanted to know why he had not applied for an unpaid leave of absence for the time he was away. After further correspondence by e-mail, he received a written warning because of him "grossly neglecting his work and teaching duties".

This was not the first time he went away for a stay as artist-in-residence so he had taken for granted that he could follow the same procedure as before when he needed a leave of absence.

– During my stay, I made a mistake in the application system, but I notified my employer and told them I wanted to discuss my leave of absence at our next meeting in January. I did what I had always done, I fulfilled my work requirement in advance. In my job description, nothing is said about me having to be in a specific place at a specific time; it has always been decided through an agreement between me and a supervising administrator, depending on the circumstances.

The warning came as an unpleasant surprise, but Albert Braun still thought that the whole business could be sorted out. He points out that an integral part of the job, as he sees it, is to forge contacts with artists and arts colleges all around the world, through one's own art projects. He has shared these contacts with his students, and they have also made it possible to invite guest lecturers and guest artists to Ostrobothnia.

– We are a small unit in a small town. We need outside contacts and our students and alumni must have the opportunity to go to places where they can have new influences and input.

IN OTHER WORDS, he thought everything would be cleared up once he got back to Finland. There was to be a meeting in January where he would get to discuss the matter with his employer and others involved. Instead Albert Braun received another email. This time he was informed that his work contract had been terminated with immediate effect.

– I'm, in fact, employed by the town of Jakobstad/Pietarsaari. My professional services have been bought by Novia University of Applied Sciences.

Even if he made a formal mistake, he finds it disheartening to be thrown out of a job he has held for more than thirty years.

– I'm not too keen on making a fuss, but I won't accept being treated as a criminal. I can understand that people start wondering about what I have done when my

contract was terminated in such a brusque manner. People must think that I'm dangerous or something when I'm treated this way.

Braun says that he informed his employer that he was prepared to submit a late application for leave of absence without pay, but in that case he expected compensation for the extra work he did in order to be able to travel to the US.

Since he is employed by the town, he asked the town council to look at the termination of his work contract.

– I received a pretty vague reply, no mistake had been made, in their view. They also claim that they are not formally qualified/required to deal with the matter, even if the town council is referred to in the termination of my contract. This leaves me no other alternative than to go to court.

Albert Braun says that he is concerned about the situation of arts education at Novia. The teachers are too few, in his opinion, and the continuity will suffer if austerity measures go too far.

Anne-May Wisén

The Unit Manager won't comment on an individual case

Kajsa Dahlbäck is Unit Manager at Novia in Jakobstad/Pietarsaari.

She says that she can't comment on the termination of Albert Braun's contract other than in general terms.

JAKOBSTAD. In a workplace the same rules apply to everyone and they are based on laws and regulations, says Kajsa Dahlbäck, Unit Manager at Novia Jakobstad.

She says that the goal is to create equality in work life, both for employees and employers.

According to Kajsa Dahlbäck, there are no demands for cutbacks in education at the moment.

On the contrary, we are supporting the visual arts department by employing a new producer for the project space Energiverket.

Additionally, we have worked on improving our economy in various ways and strive to introduce a new form of guest teacher at the beginning of the autumn term.

Anne-May Wisén