

# Statement LBC-K.U.Leuven on the sacking of a BAP employee

The trade union delegation of LBC at the K.U.Leuven has always defended free and independent scientific research and research valorisation to benefit society. In our union actions we have argued for years in favor of additional structural public financing of research. We do not wish to take a position w.r.t. the desirability of the test field in Wetteren designed for developing GMO potatoes, nor w.r.t. the legitimacy of the action against it and the methods that have been used. There are different opinions in our ranks about these things, as should be allowed.

We view the university as the place par excellence where truth discovery is central and where the valorisation of knowledge is checked against social and ethical values. By their nature, research and valorisation involve frictions and dissidence: conflicting visions, theories, methodologies, techniques, applications ... One can find these in all domains and also in discussion all over the world. Since its origin, it has never been any different at the K.U.Leuven. Clashes of ideas and at the same time a large degree of tolerance – both part of its heritage – have led to its leading position in research and innovation.

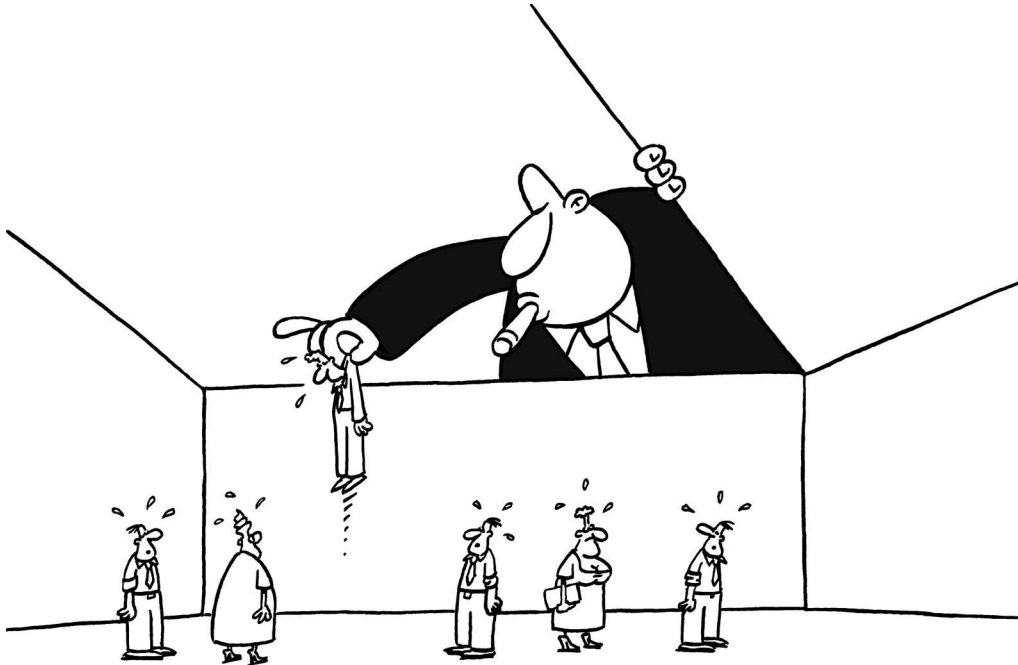
During the events in Wetteren on May 29, 2011, this clash of ideas has resulted in damage to an experimental setup because of actions of the FLM. Insofar as the FLM intended from the start to wreak widespread damage to this experiment, the union movement can only regret this and declare our solidarity with the researchers who could only watch those events unfold. The academic world in general has already condemned this aspect of the actions while carefully distinguishing it from the promotion of deviant opinions.

**However, as a trade union our priority is to defend the employees.** Of all Flemish universities, only the academic authorities of the K.U.Leuven have taken reprisal measures against a staff member. We strongly disagree with the manner in which this

dismissal came about. In our opinion, which by the way is widely agreed to (cf. the petition and the public reactions, a.o.), it was pushed through **hastily**. Moreover, the targeted individual was denied any serious right of defense or assistance. In contrast to the administrative and technical staff (ATP), for which a collective agreement (CAO) arranges a dismissal procedure with possibilities for mediation and appeal, the academic staff does not currently have a clear dismissal procedure. Labor law alone is inadequate to resolve conflicts like this in an academic context.



We have been asking for a long time to negotiate a modern and decent collective agreement which can offer an appropriate framework for academic staff, also in other respects. Following this dismissal, we therefore demand the start of negotiations on a new **collective agreement for the academic staff**. It should, amongst others, include a sound and clear dismissal procedure, and a comprehensive description of the **scope of scientific deontology** and of the sanctions for any violations against it.



**We oppose the dismissal** and the way it was implemented. We urge the academic authorities to reconsider the dismissal of Dr. Barbara Van Dyck based on the arguments mentioned above. She has claimed not to have participated herself in the damaging of the test field, but she did publicly express her support for the action and refused to revoke that opinion. A university should be an oasis of critical reflection, in which fundamental differences of opinion are allowed. An opinion that does not match that of the academic authorities is, in our view, no justification for sanctions, let alone disproportionately severe sanctions like dismissal “om dringende reden” (immediate dismissal without unemployment benefits).

Besides collective bargaining and potential adjustments to the working regulations, we also wish to participate in a **broad and open public debate** on the balance between freedom of research and freedom of speech and campaigning; a debate in which all viewpoints can be defended **without the threat of dismissal**. We also encourage a broad and open public debate on the desirability of publicly funded development and valorisation of controversial technologies and the role of patents w.r.t. open access to research results.

More information about LBC-K.U.Leuven at <http://www.lbckul.be>