

Defending the Academic Fortress (1970)

Abstract

In response to student riots at many universities, faculty members established the Association for the Protection of Academic Freedom [*Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft* or BFW]. At the group's constitutive meeting, faculty members reported on the chaotic situation in many lecture halls in the Federal Republic.

Source

Berlin

Statement by Peter Sötje, State Commissioner at the Technical University of Berlin, on the situation at the TU Berlin, September 12, 1970

The 29-year-old political scientist was appointed as state commissioner for examination matters on August 4, 1970, by Professor [Werner] Stein, Senator for Science and Art, after examination regulations had been ignored several times.

The situation in the architecture department, especially in the past three semesters, can only be described as chaotic. [...] Students and examiners intentionally ignored examination regulations. The exams became a farce. [...] There was no assessment of individual performance. During the past semesters, examinations based on group work became more prevalent. [...] Exam questions were circulated well in advance of the test. The choice of topics and the course of the oral examinations was largely left to the students themselves. [...]

Significant portions of the faculty are obviously overwhelmed by the conflict, which is largely political in nature. University instructors have long responded to constant rule-breaking, especially when it comes to examinations, with either passive acceptance or even active encouragement. Today, they themselves say that, "in order not to lose the basis for communal attempts at reform, they are always prepared (or were always prepared) to suppress the realization that the conflict is not predominantly an academic one, but rather a political one that is being carried out at all costs."

Indeed, there are things happening at universities today that are so outrageous that they dwarf the retaliations committed by extremist groups before the new university law went into effect. In the architecture department, these sorts of groups even managed, through the use of petty-bourgeois, fascist methods of repression and personal intimidation, to prevent the terror they inflicted from becoming known to the public. Many university instructors remain silent in response to direct psychological and even physical pressure, and perhaps also because they feel guilty about their own failings. [...]

Breaking into professors' offices, removing files and examination documents, bomb threats, occupying the offices of university professors: such actions characterize the atmosphere. Even the experience of being locked in their offices overnight was not enough to prompt professors to file charges. Incomprehensibly, some exhibited the same level of restraint when members of their families were threatened with acts of terrorism.

Munich

Report on rioting at Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich

In the summer semester of 1969, seven lectures with about 1,500 students in total had to be suspended on account of systematic disruptions and terror acts by extremist groups. A number of other lectures and seminars, especially in the philosophy, political science, and law departments, were so severely disrupted that they could only be completed with a lot of nerve and effort on the part of the respective lecturers. One professor, for example, conducted his lectures in army fatigues because he was constantly bombarded with eggs and tomatoes.

Professors Ferid and Pfister suffered severe heart attacks after disturbances and had to suspend their lectures on the advice of their doctors. Numerous professors required medical attention as a result of the excessive physical and psychological stress they were exposed to in their lectures and seminars, which were frequently in danger of being interrupted or broken up. One of the most outstanding scholars at the university, Professor Hermann Kunisch (modern German literary history), whose health had suffered greatly on account of the repeated interruption of one of his lecture classes, had to take early retirement.

Serious property damage was caused when the theater history department was forcefully occupied; the same can be said for the sociology department. The departments of Romance languages, art history, sociology, and theater studies were graffitied to such an extent that their condition became "unacceptable." Aside from the property damage caused in the department of theater studies (including the forceful breaking down of the doors), graffiti caused about 10,000 DM worth of damage to the university.

[...]

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