

The “Sit-In” as a Means for Reforming the University (June 22, 1966)

Abstract

A participant describes the first non-violent “sit-in” at the Free University of Berlin during the summer of 1966. The event dramatized the need to reform university structures and to democratize society in general.

Source

The First “Sit-In”: Revolt against Rule by Professors

On the afternoon of June 22, 1966, more than 3,000 students gathered underneath the windows of the Senate Chamber. Because the student speakers for the senate had violated the confidentiality of the session by publicizing the secret agenda, the assembly of protesters was able to openly discuss the same issues as the senate. Delegations elected by the assembly demanded that the rector and the senators take part in this public discussion, so that they could discuss their resolutions in front of and with those gathered. When the professors refused, the students entered the building and started a sit-in. The discussion continued there and was briefly interrupted when the rector appeared; he promised the students that he would meet with student representatives. He also told them to go home, but the assembly decided to continue their discussion. A teach-in was held with various professors and assistants; it lasted until after midnight. At 10 PM the student speakers for the senate announced that the Academic Senate had formally reversed its decision not to authorize any political events in the rooms of the Free University. What the tactics and confidential negotiations of student representatives had failed to achieve was pushed through by a massive demonstration by the university’s rank and file. The sit-in concluded with the demand for equal representation on student reform commissions and a resolution:

“Resolution of June 22, 1966, passed by the students of the Free University of Berlin gathered at the sit-in:

“We are fighting not only for the right to study for longer periods of time and to be able to express our opinions more strongly. That is only half of the issue. We are more concerned that decisions affecting students be made democratically and with student participation.

What is going on right now here in Berlin, as in society at large, is a conflict whose core objective is neither longer periods of study nor more vacation time but the dismantling of oligarchic rule and the realization of democratic freedom in all areas of society.

We oppose all those who disregard the spirit of the constitution, in whatever way, even if they presume to be grounded in the constitution. It is necessary to view freedom in the university as a problem that points beyond the framework of the university itself. For this reason, the student body sees the need to work together with all democratic organizations in society in order to assert its demands.”

Source: Uwe Bergmann, “Das erste ‘sit in’: Revolte gegen die Ordinarien-Herrschaft,” in *Rebellion der Studenten oder Die neue Opposition. Eine Analyse von Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang*

Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl. Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1968, p. 21; reprinted in Karl A. Otto, ed., *Die APO. Die Außerparlamentarische Opposition in Quellen und Dokumenten 1960–1970*. Cologne, 1989, p. 184f.

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