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Defending the Academic Fortress (1970)

In response to student riots at many universities, faculty members established the “Academic Freedom” [“Freiheit der Wissenschaft”] alliance. At the group’s constitutive meeting, faculty members reported on the chaotic situation in many lecture halls.

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### **Berlin**

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

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

The situation in the architecture department, especially in the past three semesters, can only be described as chaotic. [ . . . ] Students and examiners consciously ignored the current 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. It was largely left to the students themselves to decide on the subject of the exam and on the oral examination proceedings. [ . . . ]

Large sections of the faculty are obviously overwhelmed by the predominantly political conflict. University instructors have long responded to constant infractions, especially when it comes to examinations, with either passive acceptance or even active encouragement. They themselves say today that, “in order not to lose the basis for common reform attempts, they are always willing (or were always willing) to suppress the awareness that the conflict is not predominantly an academic one, but rather a political one being carried out at all costs.”

Indeed there are things happening at universities today that are so outrageous that they dwarf all of the retaliatory measures that extremist groups took 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 disrupted to such an extent that the instructors needed nerves of steel and had to make considerable efforts to continue teaching until the end. One professor, for example, conducted his lectures in army fatigues because he was constantly bombarded with eggs and tomatoes.

Professors Ferid and Pfister suffered acute 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 request early retirement.

Serious property damage was caused when the Department of Theater History was forcefully occupied; the same can be said for the Department of Sociology. 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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Source: "Freiheit der Wissenschaft" ["Academic Freedom"], *Rheinischer Merkur*, November 13, 1970.

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