

## Jöricke and Viro resign from Uppsala University

Professors Burglind Jöricke and Oleg Viro of Uppsala University, Sweden, resigned from their positions on February 8, 2007. They had been employed as chaired professors at the Department of Mathematics since 1997 and 1994, respectively.

The resignations were formally voluntary, but they felt compelled to resign during meetings that day with the Vice Chancellor of Uppsala University, Professor Anders Hallberg.

The Vice Chancellor stated in a press release dated February 13, 2007, that they had transgressed repeatedly in the discharge of their duties.<sup>1</sup>

At two meetings with the Vice Chancellor on February 8, at 9:00 and 10:15, respectively, each of them was warned for misconducting. No proof about possible misconduct was presented, but lawyers for the university repeatedly claimed that there exists a file containing evidence against them.

However, they were told some of the charges and complaints against them. Burglind Jöricke and Oleg Viro emphatically rejected the accusations and consider them a bluff to make them leave.

The accusations were first and foremost disloyalty towards the Department of Mathematics, the Faculty of Science and Technology and Uppsala University, and moreover obstructing the work of these institutions. The next important accusation was that they had insulted colleagues and had caused a bad working atmosphere.

These accusations have not been detailed, but it is believed that they have to do with criticism of decisions at the department and the Faculty of Science and Technology; see the section *Criticism of hiring policy* below.

Charges also included not developing the subject they represent, publishing too little, and not supervising enough Ph.D.-students. Burglind was accused of working actively against more women making an academic career.

The Vice Chancellor claimed that Oleg had published only two papers since 2002. The reality is that Oleg has published six papers during the period 2004–2006 and ten papers during 2001–2006. They were published in well-renowned journals or outstanding books. See the appendix.

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<sup>1</sup>The Swedish word he used in the press release is *tjänsteförseelse*, a precise legal term translated as ‘dereliction of duty’ in the dictionary by Reinhold Fahlbeck & Tore Sigeman, *European employment and industrial relations glossary: Sweden*. London: Sweet & Maxwell; Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001, 461 pp. *Tjänsteförseelse* is less severe than *tjänstefel*, which is translated as ‘breach of duty’ in the same dictionary. However, we understand that in American usage, dereliction of duty has connotations which are perhaps more severe than the Swedish term *tjänsteförseelse*.

Oleg supervised all in all 16 Ph.D. students to a successful completion of their degrees; he is currently supervising one Ph.D. student. Burglind is the main advisor of two Ph.D. students, one woman and one man. A former student of hers got his Ph.D. in 2005. The complaint against Burglind is all the more remarkable since, in 2005, she was refused to serve as main advisor to any new Ph.D. students; see below.

With respect to the charges there are disturbing aspects:

- (a) Their requests about a written account of the accusations were not met.
- (b) In spite of demands, no evidence was presented.
- (c) They were not given any opportunity to object or defend themselves.

### **Resignation**

At the meetings on February 8, to which they had been summoned expressly to discuss the working atmosphere at the department, they were unexpectedly given the choice of either resigning immediately, or else risking to face a legal process aimed at them being formally ousted.

They were offered a substantial severance pay, amounting to more than three annual salaries, should they choose to leave immediately. This corresponded, the lawyers claimed, to what they could maximally expect as damages in a legal process against the university, had they won it. Viro was offered a certain sum were he to resign that very day; and about 9 percent less were he to resign within a week. In Jöricke's case, the corresponding lowering was about 14 percent after the first day.

They both chose to resign at two individual meetings in the afternoon, without having consulted any lawyers or union representatives concerning their legal rights.

Their web sites and computer accounts were closed down within two days. Their names on the department list of staff were erased within the same period of time. They were told to promptly hand in the keys to their offices.

The two resignations on February 8 were the consequences of a long chain of events. Let us mention a few of these.

### **Part-time leave of absence**

The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Department of Mathematics summoned Burglind Jöricke to a meeting on June 2, 2005, where she was asked to apply for a part-time leave of absence during the next semester, but with the duties of full working load. The motivation was a planned absence

during classes for two or three short-time trips for invited talks and doing part of her research at home. Absences of this kind are normal for a professor and is usually exceeded by most of them. It was also claimed that she had been away too much during previous semesters, but no evidence could be given.

She refused to sign the application, stating that she had performed and will perform all duties connected with her chair.

Later she filed a formal complaint stating that she had been harrassed, among other things because the department had decided not to let her advise any new Ph.D. students, a decision which was, it was stated later, in force during one year. In particular, the ban meant that a possibility to be the main advisor of an exceptionally good student who had previously worked with her as an undergraduate was lost. The Deputy Chairman later admitted privately to her that the ban was a mistake, but that it was too late to correct it. The Chairman of the department went around denigrating her work performance.

Oleg Viro supported Burglind's case, in particular in her contacts with the university administration.

The Vice Chancellor at the time (the predecessor of the present one) initiated an official inquiry, to be conducted by the Legal Affairs Office of the university. Based on a report from the Legal Affairs Office, the Vice Chancellor formally decided on February 8, 2006, not to take any action with regard to the complaint concerning harassment filed by Professor Jöricke.

### **An ambition**

In several conversations around the department, the Chairman expressed his ambition to get rid of Jöricke and Viro. Following criticism from several department employees during the spring of 2006, he announced, on June 1, 2006, his decision to ask to be relieved of the chairmanship and to return to his position as lecturer at the university. As of July 1, 2006, the department has a new chairman. However, the ambition expressed by the former chairman obviously lingered on in the university administration.

### **Criticism of hiring policy**

In a letter dated August 5, 2006, Jöricke and Viro voiced their deep concern about the proposal to hire a new professor of Applied Mathematics. The appointed experts were in disagreement about the candidate. The letter was directed to the present Vice Chancellor, who was to make the final decision. Their claim, sharing the opinion of a prominent expert, was that

the candidate was not qualified as a mathematician (he had at the time zero items covered in *MathSciNet*, *Mathematical Reviews*). The Vice Chancellor decided to appoint the candidate.

In Sweden, it is possible to appeal against an appointment decision made by a university at The Board of Appeals for Higher Education, a committee at the national level. Appeals were filed by three of the applicants, partly as a result of the observations presented in the above-mentioned letter.

A second letter was written when these applicants had filed their appeals against this decision but before the appeals were to be considered. This letter pointed out the weak mathematical content of the work of the appointed professor, and the fact that his record of teaching qualifications had been mixed up with those of another applicant. Both letters were forwarded to all employees of the mathematics department. (The appointed professor was not yet an employee.)

The letters had no influence on the appointment decision of the university concerning the new chair in Applied Mathematics, and could not, legally, have had so.

Burglind and Oleg have been critical towards the lack of influence of professors on research policy, education, and hiring policy at the department. They are not fluent speakers of Swedish. Meetings, even those concerned with research policy and Ph.D. studies, which could have been held in English, were, at the insistence of some colleagues, held in Swedish—to their disadvantage.

### **An investigation**

At a meeting with all employees of the Department of Mathematics on November 14, 2006, the Vice Chancellor claimed that the working atmosphere at the department was extremely bad, and threatened that the department might be closed and personnel might be fired if the working atmosphere did not improve. He initiated an investigation of the psycho-social working conditions at the department, to be conducted by the Deputy Director of the Personnel Administration Office and legal staff of the university. He also expressed the hope that complaints should be formally filed to help this investigation. At the meeting, the Vice Chancellor refused to answer questions.

In this investigation, 25 employees (out of about 100) had been interviewed prior to February 8. Jöricke and Viro were not among them. Instead, they were called to the meeting with the Vice Chancellor on that day, and compelled to resign.

## A letter from Lennart Carleson

In a letter to Burglind Jöricke and Oleg Viro dated February 10, 2007, Lennart Carleson, former professor at Uppsala University, former President of the International Mathematical Union and an Abel Prize winner, expressed his sympathy for them and their opinion regarding applied mathematics. This letter was sent as a copy to the Vice Chancellor and to all employees at the department.

Date: Sat, 10 Feb 2007 14:27:59 +0100 (MET)  
From: Lennart Carleson <carleson@kth.se>  
To: Burglind.Juhl-Joricke@math.uu.se, Oleg.Viro@math.uu.se  
Cc: rektor@uu.se, personal@math.uu.se

Dear Burglind and Oleg: Let me express my sincere sympathy for you with regard to the decision of the administration of the university to ask you to resign. As a Swede and a former professor at the university I feel ashamed for the way that the matter has been handled and the lack of constructive thinking on the part of the leaders of the university. I also regret that the department in this way will lose two of its most distinguished members.

I also feel sympathy for your opinion---if not for the wording of your criticism---on the matter concerning the appointment of a professor in applied mathematics. During my active years I devoted considerable effort to the question how applied mathematics could be promoted. See for example my presidential address to the international congress of mathematicians in Warsaw 1983. A most essential feature of successful applied mathematics is that it relies on advanced mathematical knowledge. The simple models (e.g. in biology) are much better handled by experts in the field themselves. There is no room for amateurs and consensus with the mathematicians is vital to make cooperation possible. An appointment by administrative decree is completely counter productive.

In this matter the real losers are not you but Swedish mathematics and the university of Uppsala and its international reputation.

With best regards, Lennart

## Our conclusion

We, and many of Burglind's and Oleg's friends and colleagues, believe that the accusations against them were mainly a bluff to make them leave Uppsala University.

We understand that, having been met by such a hostile atmosphere, the two professors did not think it would be possible for them to go on working at Uppsala University.

Uppsala University has lost two outstanding scientists. This is, however, only one of the consequences of this long chain of events.

As we see it, freedom of expression is now at stake. Employees at Swedish universities do not know the limits of permissible criticism of research policy or other policies of the university. Which questions can be justifiably asked? What kind of criticism can be expressed? These questions have become painfully acute. The foundations for critical thinking in the Swedish academic community have been eroded.

Uppsala, March 27, 2007

Karl-Heinz Fieseler

Christer Kiselman

Erik Palmgren

Ryszard Rubinsztein

## Appendix

The Vice Chancellor of Uppsala University stated on February 8, 2007, that Oleg Viro has published only two papers since 2002. Actually, he has published six papers during the period 2004–2006 and ten papers during 2001–2006. They were published in well-renowned journals or outstanding books.

The University Library of Uppsala University manages an on-line Publication Documentation System for Uppsala University called *Opus*. It lists three items for Viro for 2000–2001 but none later. It is therefore not clear from where the Vice Chancellor’s figure, two since 2002, comes.

According to *MathSciNet*, Viro’s papers with publication year 2001 or later are:

- Viro, Oleg. Encomplexing the writhe. *Topology, ergodic theory, real algebraic geometry*, 241–256, Amer. Math. Soc. Transl. Ser. 2, 202, Amer. Math. Soc., Providence, RI, 2001. (Reviewer: N. V. Ivanov)
- Polyak, Michael; Viro, Oleg. On the Casson knot invariant. Knots in Hellas ’98, Vol. 3 (Delphi). *J. Knot Theory Ramifications* **10** (2001), no. 5, 711–738. (Reviewer: Colin C. Adams)
- Viro, O. Ya.; Orevkov, S. Yu. Congruence modulo 8 for real algebraic curves of degree 9. (Russian) *Uspekhi Mat. Nauk* 56 (2001), no. 4(340), 137–138; translation in *Russian Math. Surveys* 56 (2001), no. 4, 770–771 (Reviewer: Zbigniew Szafraniec)
- Viro, Oleg. Dequantization of real algebraic geometry on logarithmic paper. *European Congress of Mathematics*, Vol. I (Barcelona, 2000), 135–146, Progr. Math., 201, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2001.
- Viro, O. Ya.; Fuchs, D. B. Introduction to homotopy theory. Translated from the Russian by C. J. Shaddock. *Encyclopaedia Math. Sci.*, **24**, Topology. II, 1–93, Springer, Berlin, 2004.
- Viro, O. Ya.; Fuchs, D. B. Homology and cohomology. Translated from the Russian by C. J. Shaddock. *Encyclopaedia Math. Sci.*, **24**, Topology. II, 95–196, Springer, Berlin, 2004.
- Viro, Oleg. Khovanov homology, its definitions and ramifications. *Fund. Math.* **184** (2004), 317–342. (Reviewer: Jacob Andrew Rasmussen).
- Viro, O. Ya. Quantum relatives of the Alexander polynomial. (Russian) *Algebra i Analiz* **18** (2006), no. 3, 63–157. (Reviewer: Vladimir V. Tchernov)
- Viro, Oleg. Whitney number of closed real algebraic affine curve of type I. *Mosc. Math. J.* **6** (2006), no. 1, 211–217, 224.

The following paper is not mentioned in *MathSciNet*.

- Viro, Oleg. Virtual links, orientations of chord diagrams and Khovanov homology. Proceedings of the 2005 Gökova Geometry/Topology Conference, 184–209. International Press, 2006. See arXiv: math.GT/0611406.

The Vice Chancellor stated that Jöricke has only four publications since 2001. The on-line Publication Documentation System for Uppsala University lists two articles in journals and four reports with publication years 2002 or later. *MathSciNet* lists the following with publication year 2004 or later. They were published in international journals of high standing. They are:

Jöricke, B.; Shcherbina, N. On some class of sets with multi-sheeted envelope of holomorphy. *Math. Z.* **247** (2004), no. 4, 711–732. (Reviewer: Francine A. Meylan).

Jöricke, Burglind. A Cantor set in the unit sphere in  $\mathbf{C}^2$  with large polynomial hull. *Michigan Math. J.* **53** (2005), no. 1, 189–207. (Reviewer: Abidi Jamel)

Jöricke, Burglind. Hausdorff dimension of Cantor sets and polynomial hulls. *Proc. Amer. Math. Soc.* **134** (2006), no. 5, 1347–1354. (Reviewer: Alain Yger).

Edlund, Tomas; Jöricke, Burglind. The pluripolar hull of a graph and fine analytic continuation. *Ark. Mat.* **44** (2006), no. 1, 39–60. (Reviewer: Włodzimierz Zwonek).

In addition to the above, she has one more paper accepted for publication:

Jöricke, Burglind; Porten, Egmont. On the continuity principle. To appear in *Asian J. Math.*