

CARELESS, AWKWARD AND TWISTED

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Mathematical Institute: The unusual with the Uppsala case is that the debate is conducted in the press and that the worst critics have not tried to actually find out what happened. Even genius must carry out their duties, writes Tore Frängsmyr.

Uppsala University has landed in the centrum of the debate after the resignation of two professors in mathematics, who were foreigners. Alternatively one can say that they were bought out. For those who studied the history of the universities, academic fights is nothing unusual.

It happened before that Professors were fired, even when they had the royal authorization. This happened in Stockholm several years ago, and this has also happened in Umeå.

The unusual with the Uppsala case is that the debate is conducted in the press and that the worst critics have not tried to actually find out what happened. It is also shocking that these critics use the notion of academic freedom in a careless way. It is awkward when the academic debaters are not capable of carrying out simplest discussions, because this leads to a very twisted debate about an anxious subject, namely todays position of the university.

Academic freedom is about to conduct research and to teach after ones own choice. No outer institution, like the church or the state, should be able to prescribe what the outcome should be. We can also call this scientific freedom.

No, the professors were criticised that they misused their positions, neglected their students, were absent under unreasonably long periods, harassed their colleagues via threats, insulting statements, distribution of e-mail and public disagreeable performances. Several colleagues and officials were so badly affected that they were sick-listed or resigned.

Such behavior has nothing to do with academic freedom. Analogously, the two professors and their supporters pretend that they do not understand anything. Professors were not informed what they are accused of! On the contrary, if they can read, they should know. Their behavior is well-documented, reminders and warnings from the Head of the Institute, the Dean and the Vice-rector were issued (in March 2003 for the first time), written down witness statements from institute employees exist as well as e-mails. All this process was going on for many years. To pretend that they do not know or

that they are innocent is pathetic. Several Deans called attention to a "anti-rector campaign without precedent", which goes on for a long period. The Head of Mathematical Department and 12 other Heads of Departments have pronounced their strong support for the rector and the university leadership and in the same spirit have distanced themselves from the performance of the two professors. A good working environment is a prerequisite for functioning of research and teaching. This should be elementary for every employee of the university. Li Bennich-Björkman, professor in political sciences, mixes in an undue way the scientific aspects with duties and pretends that the creativity and new thinking do not fit into a furnished room. The requirement to perform their duties in a reasonable way becomes for her "being loyal", and then, she means, one closes the door to the new knowledge. This constructed contradiction is slightly childish. The University has never questioned the scientific activities of the two professors, one has only required that they carry out their duties.

Even genius must carry out their duties, if they apply and are appointed to state positions. Otherwise they can sit and be genius in their own houses.

Bengt Gustafsson, professor in theoretical astrophysics, thinks that it is slightly lively with troublesome professors and gives Olof Rudbeck as an example. The comparison is hair-raising. Rudbeck fought for thirty years in the so-called cartesian fights, but he fought for a new scientific picture of the world. He wanted that the new natural science should get a chance to give its own description of the nature and nature unity, towards the church and theologians. This was a fight for scientific freedom, so that research and education could get something from the results of scientific revolution. This type of fighting can not be mentioned the same day as the shabby harrasments, which was going on in the corridors of the Mathematical Institute.

The third example is Bo Rothstein, who is a professor of political sciences, just like Bennich-Björkman.

Some time ago Rothstein was a serious society debater. Now he became a jerk. Without any critical thinking whatsoever he makes a series of statements, which are ludicrous and based on rumour. As well as his colleague Bennich-Björkman he starts with a notorious (and secret) tape-recordings from the meeting with Rector, but he pulls up those parties which fit his purposes.

Already the fact that two professors used that type of secret recordings gives unpleasant associations. That afterwards debating researchers use this material in a selective and non-critical way is very worrying. Rothstein has been sloppy and bad-prepared. His aim is not to reach some clearness but

rather to harm the one who became his new target in the debate: Uppsala Universitet.

The cartesian fights ended when the king hit the table with his fist and said, now it is enough. It does not go like that nowadays. But we can be happy that we have a Rector who cares about the working environment and the intellectual climate and who says that now it is enough. Otherwise we will make us ridiculous to the world around.

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Unauthorized translation.