

Professor testifies on the actions of the university

Transcript of the interview with Burglind Jöricke

(<http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/uppland/nyheter/artikel.asp?Artikel=1396286>,
part 6)

Reporter Mårten Nilsson

MN. Well, Burglind Jöricke, my first question is: "Why did the conflicts at the department escalate the last years?" as you see it.

BJ. I would say it became worse in 2005 when the Department got a new prefect [head of the department] who was very young and inexperienced and did severe mistakes. There were several people complaining about them. I think I was the victim of most heavy attacks.

MN. And what happened to you?

BJ. Well, there was a meeting with the prefect and the vice-prefect in spring 2005. This meeting, I would say, it was led in the same style as the meeting February 8. There were allegations in vague terms without proofs, announcement of measures to be taken: it was called offers. That time I was not prepared to this kind of meetings. I did not do any voice recording. After that I filed a victimization report to higher university administration, to representatives of SULF. I understood at a very early stage that this would not restore my situation, so I would not have any advantage of it. I could not stop it; it was a matter of dignity. I was caring about ethical level at the department. Others were also complaining. My colleague Oleg Viro was the person who classified these actions against me as mobbing and he witnessed. This was something we did together. Well, then in the end of this one and a half year, in spring 2006, my colleague Oleg Viro and me had a conversation with the prefect and during this conversation the previous prefect apologized to me. He promised to do this publicly, but this never happened. But anyway, after this conversation the prefect and the vice-prefect stepped down, and somehow after that it got better. There were attempts to restore the situation. When the new rector came to the department to a meeting of the staff in November 2006 this was completely not justified. We were improving at that time.

MN. So things were getting better when the rector involved.

BJ. Yes, things were getting better and I cannot see any advantage of this involvement.

MN. One of the things that the rector and the previous prefect said was that you were away much from the Department.

BJ. Yes, this is again some very vague statement. It is not true as it was stated. There was a very difficult time for me. This was in connection with our daughter. She was a victim of a severe mobbing case at her school and she broke down after that. That time we could solve that situation. We brought here as an emergency case to a German hospital and I took my sabbatical conducting research in Germany. This was approved by the prefect and it is my right as a professor to take a sabbatical.

MN. They say that you didn't inform others before you left.

BJ. I informed the secretary and I left for holidays and just after holidays I informed. The secretary knew it even before that.

MN. The rektor says that the discussions about the new professor in applied mathematics later had nothing to do with this action against you. What do you think about that?

BJ. Yes, he claimed so. But actually this was the only action, the only activity, Oleg Viro and me had together during the term of this new rector.

MN: When you came to the meeting February 8 and heard what the rector had to say. What did you think?

BJ. Well, I could not react at all. I understood that this is pure bluff. He did not give me to speak. I think I reacted mostly in a non-verbal way because I had no chance to do it in a verbal way. When I got a chance I rejected these accusations. I insisted on proofs, on evidence. I asked for getting in paper these allegations but this was rejected.

MN. You were accused of having offended and harassing other people at the department. Do you yourself know when this should have happened?

BJ. No. I really do not know. I was humiliated and insulted myself. I think I wrote a sharp e-mail letter when we understood that the conflict with the prefect could not be solved in a different way. We hesitated a long time to do this. This is not my style to speak up in public telling about mistakes of other people. I was not eager to do this. Even if this was all true. But after they made public some allegations I had no other chance. This e-mail letter was sharp. Maybe I criticized people for behaviour, which I considered not suitable or maybe even unethical. But I thought about the wording. That is all. I cannot remember of any real insult or even harassment.

MN. Why do you think the rector acted against you?

BJ. I do not know. I really do not know what I have done. I think both Oleg Viro and me were inconvenient.

MN. In what way?

BJ. We cared about excellence at the department, about the standard at the department. Well, sometimes we had other opinions than other people. But I think it never happened that we were disrespectful concerning efforts or achievements of other colleagues.

MN. Oleg Viro got a warning in writing in 2003. What do you think about that?

BJ. This is something, which is also outrageous. It is difficult for me to understand how a person of Oleg's scientific and ethical standard can be alleged - as the rektor did it - for insufficient scientific and pedagogic work and for insulting people. And concerning this alleged warning in 2003, I read in the comments to the interview that he has sometimes a brusque way for expressing his opinion. And this is for what he got the warning. Well, I disagree that this was a warning. I agree that our cultures are different. In Russia or Germany we say things directly instead of vague allusions. But I doubt that this should be a reason for a deep conflict or for a warning. I rather think that this should be a matter for discussion, which could enrich both cultures. Now concerning this alleged warning: Oleg did not do anything outrageous. Again, this is an outrageous allegation. It is in vague terms. When I saw it I was just stunned and I think Oleg's answer that time made clear that this cannot be taken as a warning. I think it is highly unfair and not true to classify this as a warning. I would classify this as an attack against him.

MN: How has this occurrence affected your life that you lost your job in Uppsala?

BJ. Well, you said I lost the job. I think we were active there. We resigned ourselves. It was our decision. It was a matter of dignity. It is impossible to work at a university were this was possible.

BJ. MN. Do you have a job to go to now?

BJ. I have many temporary jobs to go now. Well, this was an occurrence, which took a lot of nerves. It was difficult to go through it. It was my colleague Oleg Viro who witnessed and gave me moral support and I must say that I feel somehow uncomfortable that this his impartial support for me in this victimization story was in a way triggering for these allegations against him like insult of people.

MN. So you feel a little guilt.

BJ. Yes, one can say it so.

MN: What do you think of the whole story? How would you summarize it?

BJ. Oh, this is a very sad story and I think it is not about us personally. I think it is a danger for the whole system.

MN. Why?

BJ. It is in some sense a precedent. This should never happen again. I think the community should care about it. And this is why we made public all these documents. This is not for us personally. This is a service to the community. It should not happen again.

MN. What do you think of the rector?

BJ. I cannot imagine that the situation at Uppsala University may be restored with the present rector, may be restored to normal academic life, to confidence, to mutual respect. I think the damage is too big. Can a University tolerate a rector who lies, who does not allow professors to speak, who conducts such a meeting?

MN. In what way has he lied?

BJ. He lied, for instance, after our resignation. He said that after we listened to the allegations we decided that it would be better for us to resign. And after that he offered us a severance pay. It was vice versa. He told us that he wants us to resign and in case we do this we get some severance pay. There were many lies of this kind.

MN. How had this affected the reputation of the Uppsala University, as you see it?

BJ. It harms the reputation, of course. And this is very unfortunate for the University and I think also for the whole of Sweden. We are sorry for this. He accused us in disloyalty to the management. First of all, a rector cannot require loyalty to him in the sense that we have to obey. This is impossible. Scientists have to be loyal to truth, to science, to the whole society. They serve the society. The rector is in this sense in the same situation as scientists. He also serves the society. And concerning loyalty to the university: maybe we are more loyal to the university than he is. We cared about the reputation, about the standard of the department, scientific standard, ethical standard.