

Dismissed professor criticizes the Vice-chancellor

Transcript of the interview with Oleg Viro

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Reporter Mårten Nilsson

MN. When was the first time you met Anders Hallberg?

OV. At the meeting that I mentioned.

MN. In November?

OV. In November.

MN. So we are now talking about the big meeting he had at the Institution?

OV. Yes

MN. And nobody at the Institution knew what he was going to say?

OV. Not that I am aware about. Maybe someone.

MN. He threatened to close the Department?

OV. Yes. It was formulated like this.

MN. It is said there had been severe conflicts at the Institution and that was why he came. Have you seen much of the conflicts at the Institution?

OV. Well, there was a conflict surely, maybe several conflicts. But I wouldn't say any of them would deserve such an action. And by the time of this meeting the situation was getting a little bit easier. So this meeting, of course, sharpened the atmosphere. At the meeting after his very energetic speech when he promised to fire anyone or to dismiss the whole department he also added that he had signals but he has no written denunciation and he asked people to write this. And the rector left the room. By the way it was also interesting how he did this. After his speech, which was in Swedish, and I didn't follow much, I tried to ask a question. The question was exactly about this letters that he didn't reply. But I tried to ask my question in English. He replied: "Here we speak Swedish." I said, ok, but I don't speak Swedish. Then he said: "Write me." I said: "I wrote, but you didn't reply." Then he said: "Write me again" (or something like that) and left the room very fast.

MN. So the first time you met him was at the big meeting at the Institution in November.

OV. Yes.

MN. And the next time you met him was when he asked you to resign.

OV. Yes.

MN. The rector has said that the working environment was that bad that he had to do something and that's why he had asked you and Burglind Jöricke to resign. What do you say about this?

OV. He didn't explain this in that way. When we met he arranged a sort of show. Originally we were invited to his working office. But then he redirected this meeting to the Ceremonial Office in another building. And there he spoke only through translator and his legal advisors attended. So basically it was not a conversation at first, it was just a speech. He didn't allow me much to ask. And I also wanted to listen to him.

MN. And you brought the tape recorder in your pocket to this meeting.

OV. Yes.

MN. Why did you do that?

OV. Well, because I didn't trust much the agenda. I didn't know what to expect.

MN. Have you had any signs before that you and Burglind Jöricke were suspected to have done things to the working environment that was not good?

OV. Well during the work of this rector the only things that we did together were these letters that I mentioned. Letters of concern to the rector. And he didn't reply. Before that we also had very little to do together. She was also professor at the department so we had to do a few things together. But the year before that she filed a victimization complaint and I was a witness for her because one of the points of this complaint was that she was not allowed to have a new graduate student with whom she worked during his Master preparation. And I was approached by the prefect before that with the request to take over this student. I refused, but I thought this is an important point of her complaint. So this really we did together. Her complaint was declined. There were many other things in the department happening during the previous year. I think, mainly because of the change of the prefect. The new prefect was very young and very active and he did some things wrongly. He created lots of conflicts. After all he resigned and

now we have another prefect. Well, not we! I am out! I have to tell you first of all that I have no personal interest in this business because I have resigned. It was pushed, it was made under pressure, but it was my decision. I decided that I cannot work at a University, where is such a rector, where is such a management. And after that what I am doing about this is only a service to the community. I consider this case as important as other people.

MN. Is that why you want to speak public and why you put out material on your home-page at the internet?

OV. Yes. Believe me it was not an easy job to write down the transcript from this.

MN. Why did you?

OV. Just because I wanted to let people know this. And later on it was sort of confirmed because on the requests from, say, the President of the European Mathematical Union, the rector replied about this case in a wrong way. So if I had not this transcript he could lye whatever.

MN. And then you asked many times to see the evidence against you.

OV. That's right, because there was no evidence the rector didn't want to give me any written documents. A strange point after all. A rector invites a professor and doesn't give him a possibility to speak up. He didn't want me to ask him questions at any time.

MN. At the same time when the big meeting was at the Institution the rector said there will be an investigation. Were you never questioned in that investigation?

OV. Yes. Never. We expected that we would be called. The order in which people were called for these interviews was very specific. So we could suspect that we are under investigation. I think that the whole commission was made just to collect material for allegations against us.

MN. So they have decided from the beginning that you and Burglind Jöricke were the ones who had caused everything.

OV. Probably.

MN. Is there any ground for that, as you see it?

OV. Well, we didn't hesitate to write this message. Probably the rector was angry with this message. I don't know. He had to reply somehow but he had nothing to reply unless he would change the decision.

MN. It was a letter about a professor.

OV. About a procedure of hiring of a new professor in applied mathematics. But I have to tell you that the rector never mentioned this letter as our sin. He wanted to avoid this as much as possible.

MN. What do you think of the rector?

OV. I don't know what to think. He is really strange. I don't think that he looks like a rector that I knew. I met other rectors. Some of them were great rectors. I cannot imagine that they would afford to do things like that. To come to the department with such a speech, to fire professors without conversations is outrageous. I think this is something very special. I do think that this is not good for Uppsala University to have such a rector. He wants to implement in the university very wrong notions. He is not alone in this. I mean this notion of loyalty. This notion is coming from corporate business, from business, where to some extent it is legitimate. When an owner requires that people who worked for him are loyal to him and delegates this to the management, it is somehow ok. But the university is not private. Even if it was private it would be designed to serve people, to serve the state, to serve the tax payers. And any rector is not an owner. He cannot request loyalty towards him personally and what is happening really is this request for loyalty. In the same first meeting with the department it was one of the main points that: "We should require loyalty, who wouldn't be loyal wouldn't work here". Something like that. And to the question what is loyalty, which was asked not the rector - the rector didn't answer to any questions - but to the lawyers the immediate reactions was that if you have such a question then you have a problem. So I think this is a very bad tendency. It should be stopped. Otherwise the university would have huge problems, not only the math department, everywhere.