

Few aspects are as important as the government of the universities

REPLY. It is always interesting to read Tore Frängsmyr. But this does not say that he is always right. In his article of UNT September 2 he calls a number of academic debaters to account, which in "careless, awkward and twisted" ways criticised the circumstances of the two mathematics professors resignation, and among those debaters myself.

A main point of Frängsmyr is that none of us have understood what academic freedom is, but that we live under the impression that it gives professors the right behave in any way they like. I am "in an undue way" mixing up the "the scientific aspects with the duties". Really? So, in the spirit of a good source criticism, I cite from my latest article on the present matter (UNT July 23): "I have never claimed that a professor may do whatever (s)he wants under the pretext of academic freedom. Of course professors as well as anybody can commit a serious official misconduct, e.g. by refusing to work, and therefore have to leave. As well they can, as for example in the noteworthy case of the professor of History Dick Harrison at Lund, expose others to harassment and receive a warning, as Harrison did, from the disciplinary board for state employees." Hence we are in complete agreement that academic freedom does not give researchers the right to neglect their duties. However the given and important task to protect the working environment - which has almost become a mantra in the defense of the actions of the university - cannot give the administration carte blanche to act against employees. References to the protection of working environment can not be a valid argument to escape all discussion about the reasons why - as in this case - high officials in effect get fired or about the way this is done. At this point our opinions apparently differ.

Tore Frängsmyr does not like the fact that there are tape recordings from the meeting on February 8. He likes even less that anyone listens to them. This logic, especially when it is used by a historian that ought to appreciate contemporary sources, is incomprehensible. It is of course not a flattering image of the university that is presented. So far no one has stated that it is false. Few things are clear-cut in this complicated story. But the tapes exist.

Finally, Frängsmyr is worried that the debate deflects the interest from the really important issue, namely the standing of the universities today. Is that so? I thought this was exactly what we were discussing. As is well-known the

great principles are not seldom reflected in the individual decisions. Against the background of the change in control and management of the universities that has taken place the last decades, where it is obvious that a transition in the direction of a more hierarchical line organization takes place, there are few aspects that are more important than how leadership is exercised on different levels and how the relations between the academic profession and the administrative management are organised. More debate is needed on these issues, not less.

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This is an unauthorized translation by NN.