

## Complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO) against Professor Anders Hallberg, Vice Chancellor of Uppsala University

This complaint concerns events at the Department of Mathematics at Uppsala University that culminated with the resignation of two professors under remarkable circumstances during a meeting on February 8 with the Vice Chancellor. I regard the Vice Chancellor's, and the university management's, treatment of the two professors as deeply unethical and unfair. I will now briefly describe (some of) the events — a more detailed description is to be found in attachments 1 and 2.

### *Course of events*

On February 8 the two professors — Burglind Jöricke and Oleg Viro — were called each separately to a meeting with the Vice Chancellor “concerning the situation at the Department of Mathematics” (see attachment 2). The background was a conflict at the department which had previously led to the conducting of an investigation into its working climate. In connection with this investigation about 25 employees were interviewed (until February 8), but not including Jöricke or Viro. A reasonable interpretation of the invitation to the meeting was that they would now be given the possibility to present their points of view, and their acceptations were enthusiastically phrased. They met Vice Chancellor Hallberg individually. Also present at the meetings were the personnel officer Bo Waerme and the lawyer Per Abrahamsson, as well as interpreters.

The meeting with Viro starts with Hallberg declaring that the investigation into the working climate is completed, and that it has clearly shown that Viro had been guilty of several instances of misconduct. The Vice Chancellor therefore issues a so called 'caution' to Viro. He explains that this means that at the next transgression by Viro, however small, he will propose to the disciplinary board of the university to dismiss Viro. He then adds, more or less immediately, that “we”, as well as he personally, want Viro to end his appointment. He offers a certain sum of money as a compensation if Viro resigns on the very same day. Later during the meeting the amount of money is discussed, and Hallberg offers a week of grace, but stresses that the amount of the compensation will decrease unless Viro resigns already on the same day. He later also explains the economical consequences of Viro not accepting resignation, but submitting himself to a regular firing.

During the conversation Viro vainly tries to get to find out the concrete nature of the accusations levied against. He is informed in general terms, but with no specific examples. The accusations amount to Viro having obstructed the work

of the management of the department, as well as that of the faculty [administrative unit of departments] and the university, and has not performed the duties of his position. No support for the accusations is given and no specifications are made, apart from that the Vice Chancellor Hallberg claims that Viro's teaching and research have been insufficient.

After the meeting with Viro a similar scenario is repeated during the meeting with Jöricke. The meetings are resumed later in the afternoon the same day, and they each individually accept to resign, contingent upon economical compensations that to some extent were computed on the basis of the damages the university would have been fined, had matters been brought to court and had the university lost.

#### *Reason for the complaint*

I consider, as said above, the actions of the Vice Chancellor against Jöricke and Viro to have been unethical, and I therefore want JO to investigate whether they were also illegal:

1 The two professors never had an opportunity to present their view of the conflict during the working climate investigation.

2 They moreover had no opportunity to defend themselves against the accusations during the meeting with the Vice Chancellor.

3 The summons to the meeting was designed such that they would come unprepared.

4 The economic pressure to make a decision the same day forced them to make their decisions without consulting lawyers or union representatives.

5 The university management exploited its psychological advantage during the meeting. The Vice Chancellor could have his claims supported by a lawyer, but Viro and Jöricke had no possibility to obtain independent information. Since the two professors are not native Swedes it must have been particularly difficult for them to know their rights.

One detail in the context is that the part of the accusations against the two regarding insufficient scientific productivity, has turned out to be unfounded — the Vice Chancellor's statements regarding the number of published articles were simply wrong. Predictably the Vice Chancellor later asserted that this part of the accusations was of less importance. A natural question is then why the Vice Chancellor brought it up at all during the discussions. Probably it was because he knew that the other accusations — which were never made precise — by themselves were not sufficient. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the amounts awarded to them in their agreements, were calculated according to the possible damages that the university could be obliged to pay.

## *Conclusion*

The Vice Chancellor Hallberg has claimed in an interview to *Upsala Nya Tidning*, as well as in a letter to The European Mathematical Society that the two professors voluntarily resigned, after having been confronted with his warning (see attachments 3 and 6). The lawyer for the university, Per Abrahamsson, has also stated that the Vice Chancellor himself would have preferred them to stay (attachment 4), and that the goal of the meeting was that they should heed the warning and then go back to work. This description of the events are not at all in accordance with the description in attachment 2, which is a transcription of the tape recordings that the two professors made during the meeting. The fact that Hallberg and Abrahamsson afterwards gave a grossly misleading, or even untruthful, picture of what transpired during the meeting, indicates that they have been fully aware of the culpability of their actions.

The working climate investigation which was discussed during the meeting has now been completed. The conclusions can be found in a document from March 21, which I enclose as attachment 5. I find it to be an almost unreal in its reading. In that document it is emphasised that the conflict at the department of mathematics can not be solved by identifying perpetrators or by imputing guilt. *Nowhere in the report is it mentioned that the two professors already by the Vice Chancellor and the university management have been pointed out as guilty and been forced to resign.*

An essential part of the accusations against Jöricke and Viro, is that they have been be working against the management. Allegedly one of the under-signers of the document in attachment 1 has been warned by the Vice Chancellor — that he has also by disseminating this document opposed the management. The management of the university seems to be protecting itself from criticism by threatening their employees. This kind of managerial style must be very improper at any working place — at a university it is catastrophic.

The events in Uppsala has attracted quite a lot of attention, in Sweden and also abroad. I enclose as attachment 7 a letter from five prominent American mathematicians to the minister of education Leijonborg. In the letter the events in Uppsala are described as unprecedented in modern times within the academia in democratic countries. The action of the university managements has not only damaged, the two professors, or the university of Uppsala, but also the image of the Swedish university system abroad.

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