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The "Sit-In" as a Means for Reforming the University (June 22, 1966)

A participant describes the first non-violent "sit-in" at the Free University of Berlin during the summer of 1966. The event dramatized the need to reform university structures and to democratize society in general.

The First "Sit-In": Revolt against Rule by Professors

On the afternoon of June 22, 1966, more than 3,000 students gathered below the windows of the senate meeting hall. The student speakers for the senate had violated the confidentiality of the session by publicizing the secret agenda, which enabled the assembly of protesters to openly discuss the same problems as the senate. Delegations elected by the assembly demanded that the rector and the senators take part in this public discussion in order for them to discuss their resolutions before and with those gathered. When the professors refused, the students entered the building and started a sit-down strike. The discussion continued there and was briefly interrupted when the rector appeared; he promised the students that he would meet with student representatives. He also told them to go home, but the assembly decided to continue the discussion. A teach-in, which lasted until after midnight, was held with various professors and assistants. Around 10 PM the student speakers for the senate announced that the academic senate had formally reversed its decision not to authorize any political events in the rooms of the Free University. What the tactics and confidential negotiations of student representatives had not been able to accomplish was pushed through by a massive demonstration by the rank and file of the university. The sit-in was concluded with the demand for equal representation on student reform commissions and a resolution:

"Resolution of June 22, 1966, passed by the students of the Free University of Berlin gathered at the sit-in:

"We are fighting not only for the right to study for a longer period of time and to have a greater voice in expressing our opinions. That is only half of it. We are more concerned that decisions affecting students be made democratically and with student participation.

"What is going on right now in Berlin is a conflict, like that in society at large, the main point of which is neither longer periods of study nor increased vacation time. Instead, it is about dismantling oligarchic rule and implementing democratic freedom in all areas of society.

"We oppose all those who do not respect the spirit of the constitution, in whatever way, even if they presume to be grounded in the constitution. This is about viewing freedom in the university

as a problem that points beyond the realm of the university itself. For this reason the students see the need to work together with all democratic organizations in society in order to assert their demands.”

Source: Uwe Bergmann, “Das erste ‘sit in’: Revolte gegen die Ordinarien-Herrschaft” [“The First ‘Sit-In’: Revolt against Rule by Professors”], in *Rebellion der Studenten oder Die neue Opposition. Eine Analyse von Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl* [*The Student Rebellion or the New Opposition. An Analysis by Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl*]. Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1968, p. 21; reprinted in Karl A. Otto, ed., *Die APO. Die Außerparlamentarische Opposition in Quellen und Dokumenten 1960-1970* [*The APO. Extraparliamentary Opposition in Primary Sources and Documents 1960-1970*]. Cologne, 1989, p. 184f.

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