Freiger (Stephan) et al. (eds.): *Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs ohne Zukunft?* Bundesassistentenkonferenz/Hochschulentwicklung/Junge Wissenschaftler heute. Kassel, Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1986, 271 p. DM 18. (Kasseler Hochschulwoche 11) ISBN 3-7982-0452-7

This is a report of a Conference that took place in October 1985 at the *Gesamthochschule Kassel* within the framework of the activities of the University's *Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung*.

Organized more than ten years after the dissolution in 1974 of the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz*, the main objective of the Conference was to stimulate reflection on one of the organizations that had had the greatest influence on the reform of the German universities after 1968. Another concern of the meeting was to keep alive the discussion on the 'Junge Wissenschaftlicher' situation by trying to clarify its relation with the general development of higher education. As with the Conference, the report is divided into three parts. The first is historical, the second conveys the stands taken by the present generation of lecturers, and the third refers to the empirical research on what the Germans call the 'Mittelbau'.

The first part thus deals with the aims and development of the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* during the whole of its brief existence (1968-1974). It is based largely on the accounts and opinions of the major actors of the time. It is probably useful to remind the reader that the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* was a kind of 'States General' of the academic staff who did not hold the rank of professor. During the student uprising, it appeared as a form of arbiter for the rapidly growing opposition between established professors and the student movement. This explains the considerable influence it exercised on the media and public opinion, and on the official bodies, over a relatively short period even though, as some witnesses point out, it did not always function smoothly.

Over a few years the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* carried out a remarkable work of conceptualization, inspired by an 'idealistic' vision of the role of universities in society as a prime mover of (r)evolution. It dealt mainly with the relationship between the university and the outside world, with academic organization and the division between disciplines, with organizational structures and the status of academic staff. The creation of the *Gesamthochschulen*, which were conceived precisely to put in concrete form a certain number of reforms in these fields, was greatly influenced by the position taken by the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz*.

According to most of the witnesses, it was the fundamental incompatibility between an ambition to take part in the elaboration of higher education reform policies, on the one hand, and the aspect of grouping of interests, even of a trade union organization, on the other, that ended up by paralysing the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* in eroding both its credibility and the value of its standing.

The purpose of the organizers of this Conference was not — and this they maintain — to make a strictly historical analysis in the first part of the volume. It is, however, to be regretted that the evocation of the major debates of the time is not more objective in the sense that over and above an analysis of concrete problems, which are now generally recognized, the global interpretations advanced are coloured strongly by an ideology which is not representative of the thinking of the time. While the first part of the report may, therefore, be regarded as a good source of information and interesting experience, the comments on the present situation of the academic staff — which form the second part of the report — should be viewed with considerable prudence since they originate from the staff.

The authors of the second part of the report portray the deterioration of the situation of the *Mittelbau*, despite measures taken after the important debate on reforms. They feel somewhat

deceived because the principles defended by the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* at the beginning of the 1970s were taken over and even transformed into the contrary by the authorities. This was facilitated by the evolution of the budgetary situation and the end of university expansion, despite the growing number of students, and by a considerably higher proportion of financing by contracts (*Drittmittel*), thus creating even more precarious situations for researchers.

In many respects this diagnosis is not incorrect, but it is even more unilateral than in the first part of the volume. It is inserted into a 'class struggle' type of reasoning, which opposes the corporation of lecturers to that of the established professors. It is therefore not surprising that it leads, at the end of the second part, to a call for the return to a somewhat ideological and global criticism on the part of the lecturer class on the one hand and, on the other, to the syndicalism of academic staff in order to defend their interests. This was already the clear recommendation of the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* at the time of its dissolution. The concept of a university — in which the different partners (students, academic and administrative personnel, as well as professors) administer their development by helping each other, thanks to the adequate strategic management of the institution as such — has not even come to the authors' attention.

The third part of the report is based more extensively on empirical facts and studies that are not always representative but are at least significant and offer a certain degree of objectivity, even if they do not succeed completely in raising the level of the discussion. The information that has been gathered on the financing of the doctorate and *Habilitation* work, and the impact of the measures taken by the German government in order to ensure the takeover of the new generation, will certainly draw the reader's attention. One senses a reticence on the part of the authors towards a necessary modernization of the *Habilitation* process. Indeed, greater formalization would contribute to reducing the excessive dependence of the *Habilitanden*. It can also be feared that the German *Mittelbau* may develop, leading to trade unionism which, without being necessarily negative (take the case of the Scandinavian countries), would only be positive if truly limited to material working conditions. It is surprising to see to what extent the concept of an autonomous and responsible university, capable of assuming the development of its own human potential, is completely absent in the discussion.

In general this is an interesting book, very rich in some respects, although unilateral and very traditional in the sense of a rather worrying ideological conservatism. (Translated from the French).

Roger Talpaert
European Centre for Strategic Management
of Universities, Brussels