

Lehrfreiheit, Lernfreiheit, Wertfreiheit: Max Weber and the University Teachers' Congress in Jena 1908*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the problems that originally caused Weber to develop his doctrine of a value-free science. For Weber, the question of whether one should assert practical evaluations in science, was one of university politics, and could therefore be decided 'only with reference to those tasks which the individual, according to his own set of values, assigns to the universities'. In 1908, Weber participated in the University Teacher's Congress in Jena, where some of Germany's leading scholars had gathered to propose a resolution on academic freedom. The subject was controversial, and the debate that the conference initiated was later to continue in the daily press. Weber's contributions to the discussion deserves attention especially since they shed light on his motives for propagating a value-free science. It will be argued that his campaign for value-freedom must be viewed against the backdrop of contemporary debates on academic freedom.

Keywords: value-freedom, definitions of academic freedom, university politics, discrimination, Robert Michels, Social Democrats.

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On July 9, 1908, it was announced in the *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten* that at the University Teachers' Congress in Jena a few months hence, a resolution would be proposed on the subject of academic freedom. The newspaper's cultural supplement published a document that was five pages long in support of the resolution, along with a notice addressed to university teachers throughout the country. It asserted that in both Germany and Austria, ultramontane Catholics had organized themselves into parties whose aim it was to impose limitations on academic freedom. At the Department of Theology in Innsbruck, they had recently managed to have an instructor removed from his position

* This paper was written in conjunction with the 'Bildning, yrke, politik' (Education, careers, politics) project financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.