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Students' strike

**Magda Manoliu, former university lecturer,
63 years old**

Interview done by Vlad Manoliu



It was during the university year 1990-1991. After the 1989 Revolution, things initially changed very slowly. I was part of the Department of Modern Languages within the Technical Engineering University, hence a sort of 'PE and music' in a faculty where the teachers were, as they are today, more than 90% engineers. What did it mean? That they had very little or no pedagogical training and we, the humanists, were the only ones who still had some.

Immediately after 1989, the students had gradually started to become conscious of the fact that the faculty belonged neither to the teachers, nor to the state, existing through them, through the students. A faculty cannot exist without students, hence the students have the right to decide on certain things essential to their future, to the way they learn. And what happened?

First and foremost, the students started to get together on the corners down the halls, in lecture rooms (during breaks and after classes) and to openly state their discontent regarding certain teachers. For example, a former party secretary on the entire Technical Engineering University had a son who had got a girl pregnant, a student from the Faculty of Roads and Bridges. And his daddy did nothing but expelling the girl. The boy peacefully continued his studies.

Of course that all these had happened before 1989. But after 1989, the final year students

couldn't forget the respective teacher and, according to our opinion and of that of many of his colleagues, they did the right thing. Anyway, there had been many situations when teachers had been taken out of the lecture rooms by the students.

And because of the fact that these student measures, to call them like that, didn't always have the anticipated result since there were numerous disorders, some connected to the students' discontent regarding the syllabus, others having to do with the relationships between teachers and students, other with the schedule, the students went on strike.

The strike was connected to those in the entire Bucharest University Centre. As a matter of fact, I would like to discuss how this strike echoed in the teaching staff in our faculty. I must confess that, after 1989, a significant number of my colleagues in the Technical Engineering University resembled a hencoop full of frightened hens. It was as if throwing a blinding light in the middle of the coop late in the night and they were stumbling over on the corners without knowing how to cope with the situation, what to do, how to deal with the students.

I once again emphasize the fact that their lack of professional behavioural studies in what concerned their relationship with the youngsters was more than obvious. We, in the Department

of Modern Languages, who had always been eager to embrace the new, were more adaptable, our relation with the students being indisputably smooth in all respects.

Yet, given the fact that the main part of the syllabus was technical (since we were working in a technical faculty), our attitude was hardly important equally for students or staff. So, at a given moment, the teaching staff in the Technical Engineering University was invited to attend a big, big meeting, chaired by the Rector, Vice-rectors and all the important names of the University; a meeting meant to bring together all the University teaching staff- quite many- hence, absolutely all the teaching staff was summoned in an enormous lecture room and the administrative staff of the University brought into discussion the issue of the strike.

Various speeches had been delivered and I must confess that they reminded me of the speeches delivered during the Party meetings, prior to 1989. The old, big-bellied and important 'big bugs' started to say that order had to be pre-

served, that allowing students to do what they were doing was unconceivable, that we had to do something and to reach a common ground regarding our attitude towards the students. We had to vote and to state who was for the students' strike and who was against.

The main issue was: the opinion of the teaching staff concerning the students' strike. We had to choose between: agreeing with, returning a blank voting paper or being against the strike. Good! Everybody in the university, more or less important, played the progressive part at the time. To my bemusement, everybody voted against the students' strike. The only ones standing by the students had been very few! That's it! That wouldn't have been such a problem. Yet, after the vote, we took a break and then we carried on discussing more important issues for the moment. During the break the people avoided us, the ones defending the students, as if down with leper.

Translated by Raluca Vişniac