08 2014

In Support of the Persecuted Teachers by PUC-SP

The Provost's Office of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo opened an investigatory procedure against professors Peter Pál Pelbart, Yolanda Glória Gamboa Muñoz and Jonnefer Barbosa, under the allegation of having invited, envisaged, supported and advertised the theatre-performance staged in the University's facilities in November 2012 by theatre director Zé Celso Martinez. At the time, students, professors and staff protested against Cardinal Don Odilo Scherer's appointment as Provost of the candidate who was only third place in the election. In so doing, a democratic tradition of respect for the will of the majority was broken in what is historically the first Brazilian University to implement a direct and joint electoral process for the choice of its Provost.

The accusation being pursued is that the artistic performance acted against the "moral and cultural patrimony" of the institution and that in supporting it the three aforementioned professors stimulated indiscipline among the student population. In fact, the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo has as its legacy the unrestricted defense of democracy, the pluralism of ideas, free artistic expression, independent research and a vibrant connection with society. Proof of this was the political courage of Cardinal D.

Paulo Evaristo Arns, who, during the civil-military dictatorship that Brazil endured from 1964 to 1985, welcomed many professors who had been banished from other universities, such as Bento Prado Jr., Florestan Fernandes, Octavio Ianni and José Arthur Giannotti, as well as students persecuted by the repressive apparatus of the dictatorial regime or expelled from Brazilian public universities for political reasons.

The summoning of the three professors of Philosophy is a clear attempt to create an atmosphere of intimidation, fear and insecurity among academic staff and students. The accusation is, at its basis, a clear authoritarian gesture aimed at stifling the liberty of initiative and of expression within the University, signalling a disquieting reality at odds with the academic autonomy historically woven into the fabric of the PUC-SP.

In establishing, on an official basis, the Permanent Prosecuting Inquiry Commission, which is responsible for this administrative process, the Provost's Office has decided in favor of an inquisitorial logic incompatible with Brazilian democracy, not to mention the winds of change presently blowing through the Vatican. The University which was a vigorous bastion of resistance against the dictatorship; which, for this very reason, was invaded by the police in 1977; which suffered various attacks during the 'Years of Lead', such as the criminal act in which its theatre was set on fire and destroyed in 1984; which gave refuge to prominent figures of Brazilian thought-production, refreshing intellectual production in the tropics – it is this very University that now sees itself vitality threatened from within.

We, the undersigned, living in various countries, manifest our solidarity with the accused professors, our outright condemnation of the administrative process under way, and demand not only its

immediate cessation, but also the reestablishment of the basic conditions for research, thought-production and academic freedom at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo.

Please support the persecuted teachers and oppose this attack on academic freedom by signing this online letter of support and circulating the link:
http://cartapucsp.lrdsign.com/.

Update 18 August 2014: The local and international manifestations against the absurd trial against Peter Pelbart and two other professors of philosophy by the Provost of the PUC-SP and Arcepispo of São Paulo was victorious. The inquisitors retreated and decided to quash it.