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# **Professors are influential in many fields**

In Finland, professors have traditionally been influential in many fields in society. The expansion of the university sector and increased complexity of society in general have, however, transformed the status of professors, while also affecting the forms and channels of influence. Starting from the institution of academia in the 17th century, the professorship, or the chair, constituted the primary entity of a university. Both power and responsibility were largely bestowed upon the professor. As the head of the discipline, the professor was the leader of research, teaching, personnel and finances. Matters related to faculties and the university as a whole were resolved by professors collegially. In practice, the university was the same as its professors, and vice versa.

The influential power of professors also extended beyond the lecture halls of the university. In the late 19th century, when the assembly of the representatives of the estates served as the parliament for Finland, many of the leading professors were also actively involved in politics. During the most aggressive Russification periods, it was essential to advocate for international support for Finland, and primarily the professors who had studied abroad had the necessary connections for influencing opinion. Once Finland gained independence, professors contributed actively to the construction of the young State in the capacities of Prime Minister, other ministers and various leading positions in society. After World War II, professors have mostly, with some exceptions, withdrawn from the field of political influence. In part, this is explained by the change in political powers through the displacement of the old parties that were supported by the educated classes and in which professors held a strong position. Politics has also gradually become more professional, and consequently, it is more difficult to successfully combine both academic duties and political activities. Along with the ever-tightening competition within the university community, there is no longer much time for other activities.

The 1960s were a time of social upheaval and the rapid expansion of universities, and the traditional status of professors was put at stake. For the new students representing the baby-boom generations, professors appeared to represent guarantors of the status quo, or an obstacle to any efforts to democratize the universities and their administration. Towards the end of the decade, the debate culminated in the demand for the application of the 'one man, one vote' rule to provide each employee or student with equal voting rights and eligibility for the administrative bodies of the university. The proposed reform of univer-

sity administration served to unite the previously unorganised professors. The Finnish Union of University Professors was founded in October 1969 for the purpose of organising resistance against this radical initiative. The efforts were successful, and the reform of the administration was rejected, largely thanks to the Union's activities.

The demands for the introduction of the 'one man, one vote' principle faded in the early 1970s. Probably the most far-reaching result of the debate was the establishment of a single union acting for professors nationwide. Traditionally, professors had limited their activities to the spheres of their own discipline and their university, or, as discussed above, also to the political field up until World War II. However, upon the establishment of the Union, a new idea began to take form: a nationwide collective of professors covering all universities of the country with the Union as its representative. According to its bylaws, the Union functions as a professional link between professors and one of its purposes is to uphold and further the social status and regard of its membership. Initially, the Union was not an actual trade organisation, but rather, an ideological association founded to serve a single purpose. The Union turned into a trade union and supervisor of interests in 1974 and became an affiliate of the confederation for highly educated professionals, Akava (Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland).

Since the 1970s, the Union has had two main purposes, namely the supervision of interests for its membership and the promotion of research and higher education at universities. The supervision of interests covers the traditional tasks of a labour market organisation, including the supervision of the membership's interests as regards salaries, terms of employment, job descriptions and work duties. The Union has also been a prominent actor in terms of social debate and exercised influence by expressing opinions on topical issues related to university and science policies. Even though the core functions have remained unchanged for decades, they have grown to be increasingly demanding along with the accelerating changes affecting the universities. The Act on higher education development, issued in 1986, rolled out a sequence of changes that have extensively affected the status of both universities and professors, and culminated in the Universities Act in 2010. More than 20 reforms were implemented over a period of slightly more than two decades.

The Union has constantly been challenged by the demands for changes affecting the status of its membership. Fundamentally, the issue concerns the public government's desire to re-define the traditional ideals of academic freedom and the autonomy of universities. The Universities Act of 2010 crystallized the conflict between the traditional Humboldtian model cherished by the university community and the New Public Management approach. The former entails the idea of universities as autonomous institutions whose core function

is to pursue research that is not for profit, truth-seeking, and morally and intellectually independent. The latter view, on the other hand, focuses on the efficiency of universities and their role as a driver of national competitiveness. The changing over from collegial administration to result-oriented management as well as profiling within areas that offer the largest potential for competitiveness have been proposed as the keys to achieving these aims.

Pressures for changes originated, in part, from the governmental bodies, such as the Ministry of Education (the Ministry of Education and Culture since 2010) or other ministries, which have for decades played a central role in steering the universities. However, since the start of the new millennium, new actors have entered the playing field as concerns science and university policies. For example, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) has become a major influential power. Various OECD reports have frequently been referred to when justifying the necessity of reforms concerning the universities. The voice of business life has also become louder. Not only has the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) been influential, but its affiliates and individual persons in leading positions in business life have also shown initiative. The intention of their views is to link science and university policies closer with economic and industrial policies. In 2004, the Universities Act was amended by adding 'societal impact' as the third task of universities. It was motivated by the concern that the universities would not sufficiently consider the needs of society and business in their own activities.

The second key field in the Union activities, namely the development of the terms of employment and matters related to salaries for professors, has also taken on new forms. Since the 1990s, the Union participated in collective labour-market negotiations under the public-sector negotiation body, Akava-JS, which has been known as JUKO (Negotiation Organisation for Public Sector Professionals) since 2004. The opposing party was the Office for the Government as Employer (VTML) within the Ministry of Finance. Along with the Universities Act of 2010, the opposing party changed as the negotiation and agreement rights were transferred from the VTML and the Ministry of Education to the universities themselves. The universities then founded the Employer association for Finnish Universities (SYTY ry). In 2010, SYTY joined the Union of private education employers (YOL), which was later renamed as Finnish Education Employers (Sivistystyönantajat ry, Sivista). Thus, following the entry into force of the Universities Act in 2010, the employer's negotiation body has undergone a substantial reorganisation, whereas the existing employee unions continued to represent the employees in the negotiations.

Since the early 21st century, the role of the Union as the supervisor of the interests of its membership has become increasingly challenging. The cuts of appropriations for universities, especially in the 2010s, and the funding



gap have become chronic problems. Various players representing a broad and influential field in society, including the OECD, business leaders and government administration, have presented demands for universities to streamline and prioritise their activities. This has by no means made it easier for the Union to carry out its function. The Union has repeatedly criticised the minimal amount of basic funding appropriated for universities, the freezing of the university index, and the State Productivity Programme, which all have led to significant downsizing and, since 2008, extensive dismissals of personnel within universities.

In its role as the supervisor of interests for its membership, the Union's approach has been to exercise critical but constructive influence. When the employer party was driving the new pay system for universities in a very determined manner, the Union found it best to contribute to its preparation rather than opposing the reform as such. Correspondingly, the Union endeavoured to actively influence the preparation of the Universities Act of 2010, so that it would be as advantageous as possible for professors. Given the strong will of the employer party, the ministries and other players to advance these and many other reforms, the Union has considered that, instead of resistance and opposition, the most fruitful approach in terms of safeguarding the Union's aims is to participate in the preparation of the reforms in collaboration with the actors driving them. The Union is not left alone in the pursuit of its aims but has worked in close co-operation with other unions representing university personnel.

The collective negotiations that started in autumn 2017 make an exception to the adaptive strategy of the Union. With the negotiations at deadlock, the process culminated in a one-day strike in February 2018, which concerned the entire personnel of the University of Helsinki, including the professors. The strike itself was limited to the University of Helsinki, but there were support demonstrations in nearly every university town across Finland. The unique nature of this action is underlined by the fact that, for the first time in Finland, professors resorted to the heaviest of industrial actions, a strike. The professors had issued a strike warning twice before this, in 1984 and 2010, but in both cases the situation was resolved through negotiations. The strike in 2018 reflects a fundamental change that has taken place within universities. Traditionally, the State as the employer and the employees within the universities have shared, at least to some extent, an idea and experience of working for the benefit of society. In 2018, this was no longer true. In 2010, universities had become internally divided when the university was given the role of employer while the professors as well as other teaching and research personnel became wage-earners in an employment relationship with the university. This falling into two different camps was reflected in the lack of trust and the resulting strike.

In the turmoil of changes, professors have not always been united in their opinion. For example, in connection with the negotiations concerning

the new salary system for universities, opinions were widely dispersed. Representing the professors employed by various universities and research institutes across Finland, the Union has been forced to take into consideration the mutually discrepant interests of different universities. The Union faced a tricky issue in 2010 when Aalto University was granted significant additional funding in a situation where other universities had to dismiss personnel. Similarly, the discussion concerning the number of universities in Finland and the profiling of their operations has been problematic for the Union. The Union Board and Union Council have, however, managed to formulate a unified opinion even on the most difficult matters. This is a prerequisite for the effective supervision of interests, which can be considered as having been successful in many cases. For example, as a result of the Union's demands, the qualification requirements for professors remained high in the Universities Act of 2010, and the Act also provides that the majority of the board members in public universities shall represent the university community. The strike in 2018 was fruitful, too, since the university employees received, in contrast to the original proposal by the employer, salary increases that were in line with the general increases agreed across the labour market.

Reforms concerning the universities promoted by external parties have often caused uncertainty among professors. From the 1970s onwards, matters within a particular university were resolved mostly jointly by the professors, other teaching personnel and students of the university. Along with the Universities Act in 2010, the freedom of action held by professors and the rest of the university community narrowed crucially when the directors, from department heads to the rector, were given more power at the cost of collective decision-making. Many professors find that, as a result of managerial steering and the narrowing of independent status, their work has become more fragmented and they have less time for research and teaching. Professors are working long hours, but their profession is no longer getting the same high regard in society as it had at the end of the 20th century. Publicly expressed opinions about professors being ineffective are viewed as particularly offensive because, in fact, professors have succeeded in producing a larger number of Masters and Doctors with a reduced input of resources. Nevertheless, as evidence of the pull of academic work, only a very small minority of professors would choose another career. Communalism, freedom of research and teaching, as well as the success of students are among those factors that make a professor's job meaningful. Many professors consider their work a mission in life.