



A reformer among reformers

On the death of Professor Rudolf Cohen, former rector of the University of Konstanz

Professor Rudolf Cohen, former rector of the University of Konstanz and professor of Clinical and Differential Psychology, has died on 30 April 2018 aged 85. From 1996 until his retirement in 2000, Rudolf Cohen was rector of the University of Konstanz, succeeding Professor Bernd Rütters. He himself was succeeded by Professor Gerhart v. Graevenitz. Cohen was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (first class) for his outstanding services to science and the strategic development of the University of Konstanz.

“The University of Konstanz grieves for Rudolf Cohen. We have lost a far-sighted rector, an excellent scientist and a highly respected colleague. His unwavering dedication was groundbreaking”, says Professor Ulrich Rüdiger, current rector of the University of Konstanz, adding: “As rector, Rudolf Cohen led the University of Konstanz well during a time of structural change and modernisation, for instance when a new constitution was adopted and put into effect. As a scientist, he shaped the discipline of Clinical Psychology at the University of Konstanz decisively, initiating its important partnership with the Zentrum für Psychiatrie Reichenau (ZPR, centre for psychotherapy). A visionary through and through, he established the university’s research unit in the ZPR as early as 1969, only a few years after the university was founded, and initiated the university’s partnership with Kliniken Schmieder. Both institutions remain important partners for Clinical Psychology research at the university even today. As a colleague, Rudolf Cohen was and continues to be highly valued for his inexhaustible energy and creative power, his scientific curiosity as well as his eagerness for discussion and the open exchange of opinions. Without Rudolf Cohen, the University of Konstanz would not be where it is at today”.

From 1953 to 1959, Rudolf Cohen studied in Munich and Hamburg, where he also earned his doctorate in 1961. After completing his Habilitation (post-doctoral qualification) in 1968, he became director of the Clinical Psychology research group at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich. In 1969, Rudolf Cohen was appointed professor of Clinical and Differential Psychology at the University of Konstanz, which was founded three years earlier, building up and expanding the discipline of Clinical Psychology. His commitment not only to the Department of Psychology, but also to the structural development of the University of Konstanz as a whole, was groundbreaking. Rudolf Cohen believed in the experimental and psycho-physiological approach to understanding psychiatric disorders, a conviction that shaped the way Clinical Psychology was taught and researched at the University of Konstanz. Since the University of Konstanz does not have a faculty of medicine, Rudolf Cohen set out immediately to establish valuable research and teaching

partnerships with psychiatric hospitals and neurological rehabilitation centres. He established the university's research unit in today's Zentrum für Psychiatrie Reichenau during his first year at the university and initiated its partnership with Kliniken Schmieder. The University of Konstanz's research and teaching in Clinical Psychology continue to be based around both partnerships to this day. Rudolf Cohen enjoyed an outstanding reputation well beyond the city boundaries. However, despite various offers from prestigious psychological institutions, he remained loyal to the University of Konstanz until his retirement.

Rudolf Cohen's tenure as rector of the University of Konstanz was characterised by his tireless dedication to the university's structural development and future. One example is the reformation of the university's constitution during Cohen's term of office. He gave Professor Jürgen Mittelstraß free rein when it came to assembling and convening the planning committee, which he believed should think of itself "almost as a founding committee tasked with establishing a new and modern university". With his dictum that "nothing should be considered untouchable", he prompted the committee to re-think the existing structures – free from mental constraints and self-imposed limitations. With his foresight, his willingness to get to the bottom of a problem and his capacity for making inconvenient yet necessary decisions, Rudolf Cohen was able to reform the reform university – an act of modernisation that benefits the University of Konstanz to this day.

His dedication to educational policy issues went well beyond the University of Konstanz's specific concerns. From 1978, he actively promoted science on behalf of the German Research Foundation (DFG), whose vice president he was from 1992 until 1996. Rudolf Cohen was a member of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina as well as a founding member of the Gesellschaft für Suchtforschung und Suchttherapie (society for addiction research and therapy). For more than ten years, he co-edited the Zeitschrift für Klinische Psychologie (clinical psychology journal) and sat on the advisory boards of numerous other journals.

Rudolf Cohen worked at the University of Konstanz for 31 years – as a researcher, university teacher, structural developer and rector. In private, he was known for his passion for opera and for never growing tired of learning and exploring new horizons. When he retired as an active researcher and teacher in the Department of Psychology and as rector of the University of Konstanz, he said: "There is much I still want to learn".

Note to editors:

A picture is available for download here:

https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserver/Rektorat/Rudolf_Cohen.jpg

Caption: Prof. Rudolf Cohen, rector of the University of Konstanz from 1996 until 2000

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