

**Laudatio for Prof. Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky
on occasion of his appointment as honorary senator
of University of Hamburg**

July 6, 2006

Dear Pief and Adele,
Dear President Lüthje,
Honorable members of the Academic Senate,
Dear guests!

Tomorrow the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Center for Science and Peace Research of Hamburg University will be inaugurated. Today the University is honoring Professor Wolfgang Panofsky for his life accomplishment in particle physics and arms control and for his bonds to the University.

Both events are interconnected on a deeper level; much of this connection is rooted in the personality of Wolfgang Panofsky. It is my task to speak about those facets of his life and character which reflect this connection: his role and impact as a citizen of deep democratic conviction, as a humanist and as a homo politicus.

I met Wolfgang Panofsky first in 1970, when I was a young post doc of physics with a love relationship to my field of research. I had the opportunity to work for two years at SLAC, doing experiments with the 82 inch bubble chamber. It was the most exciting and rewarding time in my life as a physicist.

What made the years at SLAC exciting? There were excellent experimental facilities. I enjoyed deeply the great landscapes of the American West and the lively counter culture of Berkeley and San Francisco. Above all the democratic spirit and the open discussion culture at SLAC and on the Stanford campus impressed me. I experienced that work as a physicist in basic research can go along with involvement in politics in a way that you do not have to be ashamed if you look back at it after years.

In 1970 the Vietnam War divided the American society deeply. The protests against the war were often outside legality or they were pushed by a seemingly deaf government in this direction. Not so at SLAC. Wolfgang Panofsky gave space to the voices of the protesters. Public hearings could be held in the SLAC main auditorium, mostly during lunch time. Here in Hamburg at DESY this would have been impossible at that time, when the Third Reich was only 25 years away. It was a time when a chemist who indirectly was involved in cruel medical experiments with human victims in Nazi Germany became president of the Max Planck Society. It was two and half years after the famous winter 1967/68, when the Academic Senate of Hamburg University had to flee to DESY in the outskirts of Hamburg, because it could not meet undisturbed by student protests on the campus.

How did Pief become a role model and inspiration for me and many others?

Three facets and qualities of his character impressed me:

- (a) His authority and his way of dealing with others,
- (b) His position as a democratic citizen and
- (c) His preparedness and ability to get involved in politics.

(a) Wolfgang Panofskys authority

Pief is an *authority*. His authority did not and does not rely on the leadership positions and power, which he obtained. It rather relies on his broad and deep knowledge, on his ability to convince others and on his integrity. He only comments on issues which he fully understands after critical reflection. There are many such issues. He does not try to cheat or lure himself or others. He takes his partners for serious, from the janitor to the Secretary of Defence. He manages to be respectful and critical at the same time, when someone else talks rubbish.

If I read his life correctly, he owes this attitude to the influence of his parents and larger family. Already his father Erwin combined respect of others with a good grain of healthy criticism. He knew about the importance of common sense. He appealed again and again to the humanistic ethos. It was self understood in his world view that his son had to attend the traditional gymnasium, the Johanneum, where the first foreign languages were Latin and Greek.

(b) Wolfgang Panofsky as an upright democratic citizen.

I would like to illustrate his understanding of democratic rights and duties on a conflict of conscience which he got into in 1950 at Berkeley. The Korea war had started. The US tumbled into the first climax of anticommunism. Pief had joined the University of California in Berkeley after the war and had become associate professor by the age of 29. In 1950 the regents of the University of California asked all faculty members to sign a so called anti communist oath. They were supposed to declare that they never had been a member of the communist party or another organisation from a long list of organisations which had been put under suspicion. There was an implicit threat of dismissal in case of noncompliance. Pief and other physicists like Jack Steinberger refused to sign for reasons of safeguarding political freedom. Steinberger lost his access to the lab. His contract was not renewed.

Pief in the end signed under protest. He told me that he signed because he wanted to maintain his clearances. However, he declared openly that he would leave Berkeley. After receiving several academic job offers, in 1951 he chose the position of a full professor at Stanford University.

(c) Wolfgang Panofsky as homo politicus

Pief got involved in political matters up to the highest level, in particular concerning arms control of nuclear weapons. This involvement was triggered by his participation in the Manhattan Project. He had been tasked to design a pressure sensitive device for measuring the explosion power of the first nuclear bombs. He flew this device over the first nuclear test in the Nevada desert on July 16, 1945, although in a safe distance of some 25 kilometers. It worked. He was 26 by then, the age of typical diploma student of physics at Hamburg University today.

Only after learning about the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki he got second thoughts. He started giving talks on the impact and consequences of nuclear explosions, initially to lay audiences. He kept his clearances and – step by step – was asked for his expertise and advice in official circles.

One important assignment led him in 1959 to the Soviet-US conference of experts in Geneva in preparation of the 1963 ban of above-surface nuclear tests. You can hear more from him on this tomorrow. Similarly he contributed to the drafting of the US-Soviet ABM Treaty of 1972, the ban of missile defense systems which lasted for about 30 years.

Pief had direct access to three presidents as a science adviser: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Carter. In 1981 he became member of the Committee on International Security and Arms Control of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, to list only a few of his

assignments and engagements in arms control. He shared much of his insight in various talks and discussions at DESY and Hamburg University over the years.

He pursued this involvement in arms control with a remarkable energy and perseverance. I once asked him, how he was able to manage a lab of more than 1000 employees for 23 years and still be up-to-date and highly respected in the world of arms control. He told me that he spent for many years one day per week in Washington, taking the night flight from San Francisco to get there and returning the next evening after a long work day (which of course included the interests of SLAC).

Wolfgang Panofsky knows that political power has to be controlled in a democracy by the division of power and a critical public. He experienced also the lack of understanding of military and other technology among many of the people in power. He feels it is essential that they listen to well informed advice. Wolfgang Panofsky likes to talk to power. He likes to work in official settings. He did not walk the NGO path, the path of NGO's which often confront governments directly in what he considers to be one sided criticism.

I choose – for a while – a somewhat different path as chairman of the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES) which has similar objectives as IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War). At the same time I worked for establishing and institutionalizing arms control research in the University, which finally succeeded.

Wolfgang Panofskys example, authority and integrity has been a big encouragement and inspiration in this effort. This forms the bridge between the two events, today and tomorrow.

Thank you, Pief.

And thank you, Adele, for coming along.