Ladies and Gentlemen:

I certainly did not want to miss a meeting dedicated to the defense of academic freedom, and since I am present, permit me to say a few short words.

I am a German who, in the year 1933, parted from his mislead country that had fallen prey to the powers of oppression and brutal force, and who found a new home in this great and free country. Whenever one speaks of freedom, the one thing I have to say from my own experience is, that this all-important possession is easier lost than regained.

To preserve this possession should be the foremost concern of every nation that enjoys it, and I spoke out of my European experience, when I warned American audiences and expressed the conviction, that only a freedom conscious of itself an ready to fight can be kept alive and that never freedom must be so compliant as to allow its deadly enemies to destroy freedom. This is exactly what happened in my unfortunate country.

The reason for the German tragedy is that the idea of freedom, though during the Weimar Republic it was actually realized, has always been only half understood there. In the land of the Reformation it was only known as religious freedom, as a protestant, speculative, moral idea, — but one did not know and appreciate the immense importance of civil liberty on which the fathers of the American Union founded their state.

That is the tremendous difference between the American and the German state of mind, a difference which gives us confidence, when we see that...
also in this country the enemies of liberty do not rest but are playing their corruptive and fatal game under the mask, and in the name of freedom itself.

Let me show you a characteristic symptom which can be observed every time a country's freedom is threatened: it is the strange arrogance of a number of people who give themselves the air as though they had received an authoritative revelation from a higher sphere as to what is democratic and what undemocratic, what is American and what un-American. Such revelations were also pretended by the powers in Germany which drove me from my country and excommunicated me as un-German, — a judgment which for good reasons I have never accepted, and which posterity too will not accept. But just as those German judges erred as to what is German, such inspired minds the world over and also in this country are erring and giving false judgment, — calling a thing "American" which is not at all American, and another un-American which is more genuinely American than they themselves. The efforts of this type of people are always directed against liberty, — and which idea could be more American than this: the idea of civil liberty, of which academic freedom is only one expression.

It is particularly the freedom granted the intellectual youth, the students and scholars, the freedom granted a special period of life, which seems so very natural and fitting that one should not begrudge it, even though youthful liberty may sometimes deport itself with absurd
exuberance, bubbling over like young wine, but there is always time in later years for moderation, for wisdom, for conservative circumspection, and I remember an amusing reply I once received from several young people at a great American university. They were the sons and daughters of rich homes, belonging by birth to the privileged class, and they had aroused my curiosity by expressing strongly communist convictions during a conversation. I asked them how this could be reconciled with their domestic milieu and their future position, and they replied: "That's just it! When should we be communists if not now!"

This is a joke, but the matter has its serious aspect. Academic freedom does not only mean the right of youth mentally to sow their wild oats, it does not only mean the freedom to learn, but also the freedom to teach, the freedom of research and the independence of science. Where this freedom is chained by people who examine it as to whether it is "democratic" or "undemocratic", "American" or "un-American", there culture, the soul of the country itself, is in danger, and it is time for all to whom the idea of freedom means more than just a phrase or an extenuation of reactionary tendencies to get together and to make a front against the enemy. The political experiences of my own life have deeply convinced me of this necessity, and that is the reason why I welcome this meeting and why I wanted to express to you these few words of solidarity.

Thomas Mann
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