

# **1. Robert Lorenz, Protest of the physicists. The »Goettingen Declaration« of 1957**

## **2. transcript, Bielefeld, 2011**

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#### **4. Abstract**

In April 1957, eighteen university professors of nuclear physics addressed the public with their “Goettingen Declaration”, which criticized the government’s policy of dealing with nuclear weapons. Due to the fact that the authors addressed the general public, formulated a political alternative and articulated themselves in a way not consistent with their typical means of articulation this manuscript can be categorized as a political manifesto.

Contrary to the general assumption of both contemporaries and historians, the undersigneds’ moral responsibility proved to be rather one of many motives than being the dominant one. Among the reasons that had driven natural scientists to appear as political manifestators had been considerations concerning both strategy and politics of science.

In the case of the Goettingen Declaration the political manifesto proved to be an appropriate form of attracting public attention for a socially relevant topic via the media which forced the political executive of the Federal Republic of Germany to response. For the undersigned the manifesto predominantly entailed positive consequences: they all reached prominence, reputation and lexical significance.

The Goettingen declaration illustrated that political manifestos can generate civil societal effects and thus proved that manifestos are able to increase the public awareness of socially significant dangers and risks. The Goettinger Declaration called upon the public opinion and

stimulated the political discourse on the problem of arsenals of nuclear weapons. It did not only serve as a reference point for social protest movements and civil societal organizations but also turned out to be an effective tool for the public articulation of experts. For Carl Friedrich v. Weizsaecker for example the participation in the Goettingen Declaration was a turning point in his career of a simple university professor to a worldwide valued scholar and expert.

The manifesto can be seen as an example for the high demanding working conditions of political manifestos: its' success was a result of its high value for the media, the universal concernment suggested by the topic and the personal resources of the undersigned, the Goettingen Declaration also evoked a situation appropriate for scandal in the general election of 1957, the opportunity to personalize the conflict.