

Scholarship instead of war propaganda! IYSSE statement on the dispute at Humboldt University

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany)
18 October 2014

The current dispute at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin is of fundamental political significance.

The university administration has sought to politically censor a meeting of the HU International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) called for October 23 and entitled Why Do the German Elites Once Again Want War? The administration claims criticism by students of right-wing professors who openly advocate war and militarism is tantamount to “maligning” or “reviling” them and violates the norms of academic discourse.

In a letter dated October 7, the administration made the IYSSE’s October 23 meeting contingent on the condition that “prior to, during and after the meeting, members of the University are not once again maligned, e.g., in leaflets, posters, the Internet or otherwise reviled as militarists and warmongers, as was the case at an IYSSE meeting in mid-July.”

The letter stated that such forms of argument were contrary to the “academic principles of a university, which deals with controversial issues on a purely scientific basis.” It threatened, “Violations of this principle will not be tolerated by the university administration.”

In this way, the university administration is lining up behind the right-wing professors. It is attempting to portray students’ political criticism as slander and suppress it under the pretext of academic discourse. At the same time, it wants to prevent a public discussion regarding the new German war policy, which is actively supported by professors at HU.

This was precisely the subject of the IYSSE meeting in July that is being criticized by the university administration. At that meeting, the IYSSE demonstrated that Humboldt University professors are playing a central role in the foreign policy shift announced by German President Gauck on October 3, 2013, and which is being implemented aggressively since the beginning of the year by the government through interventions in Ukraine and the Middle East.

On its event flyer, the IYSSE explained: “The return of German militarism is being accompanied by a comprehensive ideological offensive. The ruling class that unleashed two world wars and committed heinous crimes is to be historically cleansed. Professor Herfried Münkler and Professor Jörg Baberowski of the HU are playing key roles in this. While the first denies Germany’s imperialist ambitions in the First World War, the second

relativizes the Nazi crimes.”

This was not to “malign” or “revile,” but to make a sober and objective analysis of what Humboldt University Professors Münkler and Baberowski had said in talk shows, radio interviews, newspaper articles and public panel discussions.

Professor Jörg Baberowski, head of the department of Eastern European History at Humboldt University, declared in February in *Der Spiegel*: “Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn’t vicious. He didn’t want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

In the same *Spiegel* article, he defended the Nazi-friendly historian Ernst Nolte, who works systematically for the rehabilitation of Hitler. “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right,” Baberowski said.

Professor Herfried Münkler, who teaches political theory at HU, argues in favour of whitewashing the role of Germany in igniting the First World War in order to justify a return to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy today. In January, he said in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “It is barely possible to conduct a responsible policy in Europe based on the notion: We are to blame for everything. With regard to 1914, this is a legend.”

At the end of May, Münkler published a paper on the web site *Review 2014*, an official publication of the German Foreign Ministry, calling for more “German leadership” in Europe and the world. Under the headline, “Interests are the priority! The dangerous gap between appearance and action,” he argues that Germany “as a trading state or export nation” should be “oriented to Germany’s interests, [and] less by its values.” (The English version of the document translates this statement with the far more anodyne sentence: “German foreign policy is, in fact, strongly guided by German interests and less by its normative foundation.”)

Since the IYSSE event in July, Münkler and Baberowski have repeatedly and publicly made clear their right-wing positions. For example, Münkler defended President Gauck when on September 1 Gauck used an event commemorating the outbreak of the Second World War, of all things, for a barely concealed threat of war against Russia. While Gauck’s speech went too far even for some bourgeois politicians, Münkler declared on *Deutschlandfunk*, “If you cannot speak about what you have learned, or that what was learned applies only for Germans but no one else, then you really have not learned anything.”

On October 1, at a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum under the title “Interventionsmacht Deutschland?” (Germany as an Intervention Force?), Baberowski pleaded for a greater military role for Germany. “Yes, of course, Germany should assume such a role and it is important that Germany accept responsibility, especially in those conflicts that affect it. But one should consider (a) what type of war is one prepared for, and (b) whether one can win.”

His exact words were: “And if you are not willing to take hostages, burn down villages and hang people, and spread fear and terror, as do the terrorists, if you are not ready for it, you will not win. Then you should leave it alone.”

Baberowski did not speak as someone warning against the terrible methods of imperialist wars of conquest, but as an unscrupulous advocate of *realpolitik*. He demanded that Germany intervene militarily only when it is prepared to be more brutal than its opponents, and to intervene using massive military force.

He went on to say that one has “to be aware that this will cost a great deal of money, and you have to send soldiers and weapons into a power vacuum in order to separate the parties from each other in the first place.” He continued: “And, above all, and this is the most important thing... you need the political will and political strategy... you have to say that in order for this to work, we will go in. And it has to be worth it. That costs money. We have to send troops in. Countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya are no longer able to solve this problem themselves.”

Baberowski’s proposals awaken the darkest memories of the terrible methods of German warfare in both world wars. The First World War began with the occupation of Belgium and horrible war crimes against Belgian civilians. Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union in World War II puts even these crimes in the shade, and cost 27 million people their lives.

This begs the question: Why does the university administration regard Baberowski’s and Münkler’s bellicose and historically amnesiac views acceptable, and a legitimate contribution to academic discourse, while the political criticism of the IYSSE allegedly contradicts “the academic principles of a university?”

To pose the question is to answer it. As one of the most prestigious universities in Germany, Humboldt University is involved at the highest level in the return of German militarism. It was directly involved in the elaboration of the strategy paper “New Power, New Responsibility—Elements of a German Foreign and Security Policy for a Changing World,” which essentially provides the blueprint for Germany’s return to militarism and imperialism.

The paper, which was published last autumn and formed the basis for Gauck’s speech, declares that Germany “will have to take the lead more decisively and more often” in pursuing its geostrategic and economic interests as a global “trade and export nation.” “Costly longer-term military operations” would be part of “a pragmatic German security policy.”

The document was prepared over the course of a year by more than 50 leading politicians, journalists, military figures, business representatives and academics, as part of a project of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP—Institute for International and Security Affairs), which is close to the German government and

the German Historical Museum (GMF), a Washington think tank. In the elaboration of the SWP document, Humboldt University was represented, of all people, by the son of Ernst Nolte, Professor Georg Nolte, who chairs the Department of Public, International and European Law.

Regarding the role of universities in the return of German militarism, the paper states: “A more complex environment with shortened response times also requires better cognitive skills. Knowledge, perception, understanding, judgment and strategic foresight: all these skills can be taught and trained. But that requires investments—on the part of the state, but also on the part of universities, research institutions, foundations, and foreign policy institutions. The goal must be to establish an intellectual environment that not only enables and nurtures political creativity, but is also able to develop policy options quickly and in formats that can be operationalized.”

As before the First and Second World Wars, under the guise of science, the German universities are being transformed into ideological cadre schools for militarism. Behind the academic language of “intellectual environment,” “political creativity” and “strategic foresight” is the requirement to return to “militaristic thinking” and a “politically creative” war policy.

A glance at the current university prospectus underscores that this project is being actively pursued at HU. A project seminar offered by Professor Münkler is entitled “Theories of war: New wars, humanitarian interventions, drone war.”

Baberowski’s department offers a course entitled, “Ways out of the crisis, ways to dictatorship? Approaches to comparative dictatorship research.” The more detailed content description reads, “It is all too easy [...] to neglect that in many regions and at various times, dictatorships were considered a legitimate response to previous crises. In chaotic and conflict-ridden phases, they promised stability and order—and were seen by many contemporaries as a solution, not a threat.”

It cannot be permitted that Humboldt University, which—as Friedrich Wilhelms University—played a central role in the preparation of the First and the Second World Wars, be transformed into a centre for militarism and dictatorship. Opposing this is the only way to defend the academic principles of a university and the principle of independent research and teaching. The IYSSE meeting on October 23 is an important step in this direction. We call on all students and serious-minded scholars to attend our meeting and support the struggle being conducted by the IYSSE against the disturbing developments at Humboldt University.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)