“Münkler-Watch” and the dictatorship of the elites

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More than a week after the political scientist Herfried Münkler invited members of the press into his lecture to denounce the “Münkler-Watch” blog, the attacks on its authors go on. It becomes increasingly clear that this not only involves a dispute at Berlin's Humboldt University, but fundamental questions of democracy.

While at the beginning of the week, the hateful comments were directed at the anonymity of the bloggers who publicly criticize Münkler's lectures, now the attacks are also being levelled against the freedom of the Internet. The right of students and non-academics to publicly take a stand and intervene in the “discourse” of the political, academic and media elites is being rejected.

On Thursday, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* used the dispute over “Münkler-Watch” for a frontal assault on any criticism on the Internet. Under the headline “Autopilot for idiots,” Bernd Graff wrote, “The much-vaunted online pillories do not enlighten and certainly do not redistribute power. They only poison and numb.” “Münkler-Watch” was a "current and yet chilling example” of this.

Graff accused the blog of not serving “discourse, but the killer argument.” It was part of an “always over-revving machinery of excitation.” The “attempt to lure a public to their own little site of excitement,” was *“the* scheme of conformity of the framework of digital discourse.”

He accused Münkler's critics of being unable to “endure dissent.” This accusation was not directed against the professor, who does not allow critical questions in his lectures and who has mobilised all available levers against the blog, but against the students who criticise Münkler's militaristic conceptions.

A similarly hateful attack on “Münkler-Watch” was published on the same day by the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*. It accused the bloggers of exercising an “intellectually barren terror of formulations and convictions,” and warned that “the new possibilities of web-based denunciation could set in motion an abusive logic.”

The basic idea of both articles is the same. The democratic potential of the Internet, which allows those who have no access to the private and public media to voice their opinions, leads to a “terror of convictions” and poisons official discourse. The fear of the ruling elites of an intervention of the masses into the political struggle could not be more clearly expressed.

Bernd Graff, who has written for the newspaper's feature pages and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* website for over 20 years, has attacked the democratic potential of the Internet for a long time. Five years ago, under the headline “The new Idiot Web 0.0”, he published an article that maligned the “participatory Web” as a “debating club of the anonymous, clueless and stool pigeons.”

“Inquisitors in their own right”, “troublemakers”, “people with strange preferences” and “spare-time activists with a little foam at the mouth” shredded any topic, Graff wrote. “They often do so anonymously and even more often with no expertise. They instigate quickie debates, act like the lord of the manor and then rush on with their scolding. They create little and tear much down. These web debaters are the death of discourse, driven by nothing but a passion for indignation.”

“Did we say indignation?” he added. “Please replace this at will by sabotage, conspiracy, malice, denunciation, disparagement, derision, mockery. Yes, we must imagine the forces of the free market of opinion to be extremely destructive.”

Taking Graff's thinking to its logical conclusion leads

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to a dictatorship of the elite. If the remarks of the “clueless” on the Internet have such destructive consequences, why should they be allowed to take part in elections and decide upon governments?

It is no coincidence that Graff speaks out again to defend Münkler against the criticism of his students. The Humboldt professor is not only a prominent proponent of German militarism and an aggressive German foreign policy, he also praises the advantages of authoritarian forms of rule.

Five years ago, in the journal *Internationale Politik*, he published an article entitled “Lame duck democracy”, which the WSWS critiqued. Democracy, he wrote, was exhibiting “signs of fatigue and overwork” and required a “revitalising cure.” It was acting “like a fussy old aunt who indeed knows everything but can no longer get much done.” However, there was “a young and powerful nephew who is willing to help, but sometimes has dictatorial inclinations. Should we put the aunt aside for him?” asked Münkler.

Münkler has also repeatedly lectured and written on the importance of social elites. For example, in a 2006 anthology, “Germany's elites in transition”, he published the contribution, “The social benefits and harms of the elites,” in which he argued for the establishment of elite universities, among other things. And last year, he wrote an article for the magazine *Merkur* about “decision-making and interpretation elites,” which he defined as follows: “elites are those who stand up to uncertainty, paradoxes and time pressure and withstand them.”

The violent attacks on students who publicly oppose Münkler's militaristic and authoritarian views must be understood in light of the growing crisis of world capitalism and the associated social and international tensions. The “decision-making elites” (the federal government), advised by the “interpretation elites” (Münkler), are responding with a return to great-power politics and militarism and with attacks on democratic and social rights. They confront resistance which they seek to intimidate and suppress.

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