

Broad support for IYSSE resolution in defence of freedom of speech at Berlin's Humboldt University

Our correspondents
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Humboldt University has changed over recent weeks and become increasingly politicised. Discussions about right-wing professors such as political scientist Herfried Münkler and East European historian Jörg Baberowski are omnipresent.

For several weeks, the student group “Münkler-Watch”, which documents and criticises Münkler’s lectures on its blog, has been the name on everyone’s lips. In particular, Münkler’s campaign for German great-power politics has been called into question by students.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) also criticised Münkler’s war propaganda, and drew attention to the downplaying of Nazi war crimes by Baberowski. Professors, university management and the media have subsequently fiercely attacked both groups.

In the central hall of the main building there are many social science students who are acquainted with Münkler via their studies and meetings at the university. They are avidly discussing the criticism published by their colleagues on “Münkler-Watch”. Opinions about the postings are divided, but the vast majority of the students defend the right to criticise.

“I think the statement by professors in defence of Münkler is outrageous. It is extremely one-sided,” said one social science student, who is also active in his faculty student group. “They are creating a climate in which no one will dare to express criticism.”

Many academic colleagues were hostile to Münkler, but feared the consequences of speaking out in solidarity with the students.

At 18:30 today, the student parliament will debate a resolution on “Münkler-Watch” brought by the IYSSE.

Supporters distributed thousands of copies of the text in recent days and called upon students to participate in the public session to back the motion.

On Monday, the student representative group for biology invited representatives of the IYSSE to discuss the resolution and exchange views on events at the university. Among those present there was considerable support for the IYSSE initiative. Previously, the student representative groups for history, gender studies and education published a statement defending freedom of speech at the university and opposing the attacks on students.

The defence of the right to express criticism of professors anonymously has found particularly strong support among students on campus. As Felix, who studies horticultural science at Humboldt, said, “anonymity is important. When one has an opinion, it is correct to articulate it, in some cases anonymously.” Like many other students, he asked for more flyers to distribute them at his residence and in his department.

Alexander began studying philosophy and music at Humboldt this semester. He has been following the IYSSE’s work, including its criticisms of professor Baberowski, for several weeks and supports them.

He said, “Students have the right to express criticism anonymously. Whether one agrees with the views of “Münkler-Watch” or not, a university that sees itself as a place for free and independent academic debate must allow space for anonymous criticism.”

Andreas, who studies German literature and history, also defended “Münkler-Watch” and the IYSSE. “Such debates over content are important, and it is good if they can take place anonymously, particularly because there is quite a power imbalance between students and

professors,” he said.

He sharply criticised the attacks made by university management and professors against the students. “This has nothing to do with defending one’s own opinion anymore, but with the suppression of other opinions,” he said.

Andreas thought the reason for the attacks on the students was the growth of militarism, which was having an impact at the university. “Militarist tendencies here at the university are clear,” he continued. “Particularly with regard to the Second World War and the Holocaust, attempts are being made to whitewash Germany’s role. This is also taking place in the media by equating Stalinism with Hitler’s fascism.”

He therefore regarded student initiatives that questioned and criticised such standpoints as important. “But this requires a university management that is prepared to encourage and allow such debates concerning content,” he said. Other students supporting the IYSSE resolution expressed similar opinions.



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