

Students in Frankfurt, Germany support fight against war propaganda

Our correspondents
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The conflict over freedom of expression at Humboldt University in Berlin is being followed with great interest at other universities. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have distributed around a thousand copies of the statement “Oppose enforced political conformism at Humboldt University,” at Goethe University in Frankfurt. It has found considerable support.

The statement calls for the defense of the authors behind the “Münkler-Watch” blog and members of the IYSSE who have been fiercely attacked by the university administration and in the media because they oppose the transformation of Humboldt University into an ideological center for militarism. Many students in Frankfurt declared their solidarity with the Humboldt students.

Silvia, a sociology student, was thrilled that someone had finally taken a stand against militarization. “I hope that the Berlin students keep going,” she said. “We cannot allow militarism and preparations for war to spread throughout society.”

She spoke about an incident at a secondary school in which a student was punished, because he protested against the appearance of a youth army officer in class. “The military cannot be permitted to increasingly force their way into schools and universities,” she said, “that is dangerous and disturbing.” Unfortunately, she continued, studies at Goethe University are “extremely superficially designed. Political relations are not questioned. Students are supposed to be made into useful, functioning members of the state apparatus who never question anything.”

Thorsten also explained that students who oppose preparations for war had his full support. “We’re headed for bad times,” he said. The latest election in Poland, which brought an extreme right-wing

government to power, also shows that, he added. “Poland is the pit bull of the US army against Russia. But war is also being prepared again in Germany. I’m waiting for the entire world to finally take a stand for peace and take to the streets against a new war with Russia.”

Rosa, a student in educational sciences, pointed to the propaganda machinery which tarnishes all areas of social life at the university and in society. “Seemingly without problem, propaganda is spread far and wide. German economic interests are being used as an argument for Germany establishing itself militarily as a hegemonic power. I think that’s really sinister. Especially bad in my eyes is that the Left Party is now involved,” Rosa continued.

She was referring to the Left Party’s position on participation in the federal government at their latest party conference in Bielefeld, as well as their support for the military. Left Party member Bodo Ramelow, the prime minister of the state of Thuringia, recently told the *Rheinischen Post* that “Pacifism is not for Germany.”

Felix, who studies peace and conflict research in Frankfurt, noted that the military already dictates, to a large extent, the themes in the field of political science. In one seminar, he said, students had to consider which possibilities the military has for establishing a no fly zone over Syria. That was sold to the students as a “peacekeeping measure.”

In reality, Goethe University is being placed in the service of militarism. The theme of war is questioned less and less and its historical and international conditions, causes and consequences are not being investigated. Instead, the next war is treated as an established fact. Rather than asking *why*, the question is now, *when* or *how*.

Professor Gunther Hellmann, who teaches political science at Goethe University is, like his colleague Herfried Münkler at Humboldt University, closely connected with the foreign policy and military projects of the German government. In 2013, he was a member of the “New Power, New Responsibility” project, which prepared for Germany’s return to great power politics.

Hellman is a board member of the federally funded university think tank “Normative Orders” and leads, among others, the project “Security communication in democracies,” which could also be called “War propaganda in democracies.” The project deals with the question, “who or what qualifies as a security threat and how they should be countered.”

As early as 2011, Hellmann and other authors published an article in the *Journal for Foreign and Security Policy* on the theme “Germany’s defense in the Hindu Kush. A case of unsuccessful security communication.” It explores the question of how the German government can better present the foreign deployment of the military to the public.

The authors state: “Abstract formulations, such as ‘German security will be defended at the Hindu Kush’ or justification narratives like the reference to a ‘German responsibility’ only make their way into the everyday life of the wider public with difficulty.” Proceeding in this way will not “logically convey to the majority of the German public that the reasons for military actions are compelling.” They recommend, therefore, “the development of legitimizing figures” that make “situations like those in Afghanistan appear reasonable.”

Hellmann’s seminar, “Theory and practice of (German) foreign and security policy” in the 2015 summer semester included “a one-week excursion to Berlin as well as extensive visits and personal meetings in government ministries and with other participants in the formation of Germany foreign policy.”

Hellman is also involved in the development of the military’s “White Paper 2016,” which determines German military strategy for the coming decade. On the military’s web site, he can be seen speaking in a video on the question “what major crises will Germany face in the next years or decades.” The video ends with the slogan: “Bundeswehr. We. Serve. Germany.”



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