

Why the German media refuses to report Humboldt University students' defense of Münkler-Watch

Johannes Stern
20 June 2015

The German media has responded to a resolution passed June 11 by the student parliament at Berlin's Humboldt University (HU) in defense of the student blog Münkler-Watch with a total news blackout. More than a week has passed since the adoption of the resolution, but not a single article reporting the event has appeared.

This is not due to a lack of information. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) sent a press release at the beginning of the week to a large number of newspapers, radio and television stations and press agencies to inform them that "an overwhelming majority of representatives... supported the resolution of the IYSSE that condemned the attacks on the Münkler-Watch group." The press release noted the detailed report on the student parliament meeting that appeared on the *World Socialist Web Site* on Saturday, June 13.

Moreover, the RefRat, as the student administration at Humboldt is known, on June 17 published the adopted resolution in its entirety.

The collective silence of the media is all the more striking in light of the scale of the coverage, or rather, the witch hunt, that preceded the student parliament vote on the resolution. For several weeks, hardly a day went by without at least one article appearing in a leading daily or weekly newspaper attacking Münkler-Watch and the IYSSE and attempting to defend the right-wing and militarist positions of Humboldt University professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski against student criticism.

Where have all the hack writers gone—those who foamed at the mouth while hammering out attacks and absurdities on their keyboards eclipsing anything seen since the smears of the Springer press against the student revolts of 1968?

Where, for example, is Friederike Haupt, who, in an article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, compared the criticisms made by students with "bomb threats and appeals for murder?" Where is Jens Bisky, the son of former Left Party Chairman Lothar Bisky, who, in a commentary for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, compared Münkler-Watch to the far-right and racist Pegida movement?

Die Zeit, the bastion of ~~What~~ liberalism, which gave Münkler himself a platform to compare his critics to Nazi block wardens and anti-Semites? Where is the *Tagesspiegel*, which reported without comment Baberowski's demand that "the university ban such 'maniacs' from its premises and take legal action against them"? And where is the *Berliner Zeitung*, which printed a column by Humboldt University President Jan-Hendrik Olbertz arguing in all seriousness that the threat to freedom of expression came not from an authoritarian state, but from the students themselves?

And what about Jürgen Kaube, now an associate editor with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who began the media campaign at the end of 2014 with a vehement attack on the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party), the parent organization of the IYSSE?

There is no doubt that Kaube & Co. closely followed the events of Thursday, June 11. The last propaganda article appeared exactly one day before the student parliament vote in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, under the title "Attack out of nowhere." A certain Elena Müller, who usually writes about wedding plans, bridal showers and love and marriage, penned a piece that distorted the facts, as usual, made false accusations, and said nothing about the content of the conflict between Münkler-Watch and the university administration.

But she had apparently researched one thing carefully, writing: "The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), an organization that wants to mobilize a fight against capitalism, recently introduced a resolution on the defense of Münkler-Watch to the student parliament of HU."

Since then, not another word has been uttered. How is this to be explained?

The media campaign was aimed at creating a climate of intimidation in order to suppress and criminalize any substantive criticism of the positions held by Münkler and Baberowski. The plan backfired.

The IYSSE has documented and exposed the fact that the two Humboldt professors, with the support of the university administration, relativize the historic crimes of German

imperialism in the First and Second World Wars and justify Germany's current return to an aggressive foreign policy.

The media is shocked that the IYSSE's antimilitarist campaign has evoked a broad and favorable response. The elected representatives of the more than 33,000 students at the best-known German university have opposed the attempt to intimidate and slander critical students.

The adopted resolution rejects not only the agitation against Münkler-Watch and the IYSSE; it also opposes historical revisionism and the militarist positions of the two professors. The student parliament explicitly calls on students "to express themselves politically, question forms of rule, and oppose tendencies aimed at trivializing Germany's inhuman history, especially in relation to the content of university teaching."

The silence of the media arises from its direct involvement in the development of state policy. The leading writers and commentators who present the line of the editorial boards have the same close connections to the government, the military, the intelligence services and foreign policy think tanks as Baberowski and Münkler. They understand the resolution for what it is: not only a challenge to Münkler and Baberowski, but a serious setback for the entire ruling elite and its goal of reestablishing Germany as a foreign policy great power and breaking the resistance in the population to militarism and war.

The media has played a central role in this from the beginning. Media figures (as well as professors at HU!) were involved in the development of the "New Power, New Responsibility" strategy paper, which provided a blueprint for the foreign policy turn announced by President Gauck and the German government at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, and is now being implemented.

The paper, which was published in the fall of 2013, was the basis for speeches by Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen announcing the end of Germany's post-World War II posture of "restraint" on foreign policy questions. The document calls on Germany to "lead more often and more decisively in the future," and declares that as a "trade and export nation," Germany must defend its economic and geostrategic interests worldwide. It adds that "costly and longer-term military deployments" must be part of a "pragmatic German security policy."

The German media plays a central role in the implementation of these goals. Over the past year, the *World Socialist Web Site* has documented in a series of articles the manner in which the mainstream media, including the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*, have been transformed into propaganda instruments for war and militarism. The media bombards its readers on a daily basis with calls for an expansion of the military, agitation in support of an aggressive approach to Russia, and declarations of the need for more assertive German leadership in Europe and worldwide.

At the same time, the press promotes the ideological offensive of Münkler and Baberowski aimed at downplaying and minimizing Germany's responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War and denying the continuity of German war aims between World War I and World War II. Münkler himself made clear the reactionary political goals underlying his historical revisionism in an interview published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at the beginning of the year.

In an article headlined "Herfried Münkler on Guilt," the professor complained: "We tilt foreign policy toward the notion: Because we are historically guilty, we are not permitted to participate in foreign policy anywhere."

In reference to the First World War, Münkler called German guilt "a legend." He labeled Germany's abstention in the 2011 NATO war against Libya a "foreign policy disaster."

Just one month later, *Der Spiegel* published the now infamous article "Changing the Past," in which Professor Baberowski declared himself a partisan of Nazi-friendly historian Ernst Nolte. With the words, "Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right," Baberowski defended the man whose ideas ignited the Historians Debate of the 1980s and who today moves in neo-Nazi circles and calls Hitler a liberator.

Like Nolte, Baberowski downplays Hitler's crimes, declaring: "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."

For months, the press has denounced those who oppose the trivialization of the crimes of German imperialism. The media's silence on the opposition of Humboldt University students to these attacks further exposes its role as an instrument of historical revisionism in the service of militarism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact