Second election meeting of IYSSE at Humboldt University

Herfried Münkler: An academic in the service of German imperialism

Our correspondents
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On December 16, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Humboldt University in Berlin held its second successful meeting in the election campaign for student parliament. The theme of the meeting was “Herfried Münkler: An academic in the service of German imperialism.”

As with the first meeting on December 9, the second meeting met with great interest. Many of those attending had also participated in the earlier lecture by Johannes Stern on the background of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) mission in Syria came again.

Sven Wurm, the IYSSE spokesman at Humboldt University, opened the meeting. He explained that the last weeks’ lectures had shown that the deployment of the Bundeswehr in the Middle East had been long prepared, and that the terrorist attacks in Paris only provided the immediate pretext for the return of German militarism in the region.

Representatives of Humboldt Univernisty are playing a leading role in drawing up plans for new military missions and justifying them ideologically, Wurm said. The IYSSE was taking part in the student parliament election to counter such developments and build an anti-war movement.

At the invitation of the IYSSE, Peter Schwarz, editor of the German language *World Socialist Web Site (WSWS)*, reviewed the role played by Herfried Münkler, professor of political science at Humboldt University, in justifying the return of German militarism.

Schwarz opened his contribution with a presentation listing Münkler’s public activities in the last month, which included nine articles, interviews and public appearances. “Why is this professor in such demand that he is constantly invited to speak on television, radio, in the press and on public podiums?” asked Schwarz.

In essence, Münkler fulfills three tasks: He revises history to justify the return of German militarism; he manipulates public opinion to overcome widespread opposition to war; and he advocates German great power politics.

Schwarz demonstrated this using Münkler’s own statements.

Schwarz quoted from a January 2014 interview with Münkler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in which the professor revises the prevailing view of history that stands in the way of a more aggressive German foreign policy. Münkler declared, “It is difficult to conduct a responsible policy in Europe with the notion that we are to blame for everything.” The Germans, according to Münkler, tended “to the idea in foreign policy: Because we are historically guilty, we must not, indeed we are not allowed to participate in foreign policy anywhere; so we rather buy ourselves free when it comes to stabilizing the crises at the edges of Europe.”

Regarding the manipulation of public opinion, Schwarz referred to a contribution by Münkler on the web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Review in 2014. Münkler complained about the “democratic vulnerability of German foreign policy”, which grew out of the “discrepancy between the public presentation and actual alignment” of German politics. “Eliminating this discrepancy, and thus closing the democratic vulnerability” must “lie in the longer-term interests of German politics”. The “idea of German foreign policy decoupled from interests” must be overcome.

In plain language, Münkler is committed to advocating a foreign policy that puts the interests of German imperialism at its centre, Schwarz said.

This was shown very clearly in the book published this spring, *Power in the Middle*, in which Münkler argues

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that Germany must play the role of a “central power”, a “hegemon” and a “disciplinarian” in Europe. To this end, one should not be misled by democratic considerations, according to Münkler. European integration was “a far too complex process to leave control of the project to the population,” writes Münkler.

In his latest book, *Kriegssplitter* (*War Splinters*), Münkler even advocates a world power role for Germany at the forefront of Europe. The Europeans would “have no choice but to define their position in geopolitical terms in the medium term,” he wrote, namely “whether they intend to act as a regional power that tries within its capabilities to ensure the stability of its periphery, or whether they tend towards equality with the US in shaping the world order of the 21st century.”

Using the example of World War I, Schwarz clarified how Münkler deliberately revises history to reflect the foreign policy needs of the present.

Schwarz then pointed out that the First World War was an imperialist war that arose out of the growing conflict between the great powers. This has been recognized for a long time by historians. Schwarz showed how in the years before the war broke out in 1914, the political and military leadership of Germany in particular had been working deliberately towards war.

Münkler, for his part, turns the facts on their head. The causes of the war, according to him, were not the conflicts between the great powers in central Europe, but their lack of military presence in the European periphery, in particular in the Balkans. From this Münkler derived the “peace and security policy doctrine”, that it was necessary to intervene in the “fringes and peripheries of the European prosperity zone” in order to stabilize them. In this way, he justified German participation in the wars in the Middle East and Africa.

For this reason, Münkler also attacks the historian Fritz Fischer, who in his 1961 book *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* showed that Germany had deliberately taken the path towards the First World War, pursuing offensive war aims. Moreover, Fischer had demonstrated that there was a continuity of Germany’s war aims in both the First and Second World War.

History was the key to understanding the present, Schwarz stressed. “But such a historical understanding requires that one examine history in its complex reality, exposing the social and economic driving forces of an historical epoch and analysing how these continue to effect the present.”

This, according to Schwarz, was not Münkler’s method of working. “He does not derive his understanding of the present from a historical analysis of the past. Instead, he invents a new historical narrative to justify the current objectives of German imperialism. He uses history as a reservoir from which he breaks out the ‘splinters’ he needs to justify his ideologically motivated theories. The book’s title, *War Splinters*, unintentionally sums up the totally eclectic and subjective nature of his approach”.

At the end of his speech, Schwarz explained the goals actually pursued by German militarism, referring to the official “Defence Policy Guidelines” of the Ministry of Defence: “Free trade routes and a secure supply of raw materials are of vital importance for the future of Germany and Europe”, it states. “The development, security of and access to natural resources, distribution channels and markets are being reordered world-wide… Therefore, transport and energy security and related issues will play an increasingly important role for our security.”

Following the lecture, several students asked questions about the meaning of Münkler’s work, his political relations and the justification of imperialist wars. Many of those present not only expressed their agreement with the presentation, but also asked how they could actively support the election campaign of IYSSE for the student parliament.

Several students took flyers and posters to raise awareness among fellow students and friends about the IYSSE meetings and its participation in the election. Others said they wanted to use the Christmas break to discuss the political perspectives of the IYSSE and to study the book *Science and War Propaganda*, which summarizes the struggle of the IYSSE at Humboldt University over the last two years.

The next IYSSE meeting at Humboldt University is on Wednesday, January 6, 2016. Its theme is “Jörg Baberowski’s ‘Spaces of violence’: A plea for a police state and war”. The student parliament election will be held on 19 and 20 January.

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