

IYSSE opposes physical attack on right-wing professor at Berlin's Humboldt University

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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On November 8, at least four black-clad individuals wearing white masks stormed into a seminar held by professor of English Markus Egg at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin. They played loud music, threw water and glitter over Egg and apparently damaged his notebook computer in the process. The demonstrators held up a banner with the slogan “No place for the AfD” (Alternative for Germany), and distributed a short flyer detailing the professor’s activities in the right-wing extremist party.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) decisively opposes such actions on the basis of fundamental considerations of political principle.

It is understandable that students are outraged by the professor’s right-wing activities. Egg is district spokesman for the AfD in Pankow, has stood on several occasions as an AfD candidate in elections and obviously shares the party’s point of view. He cites “love of homeland, patriotism and tradition” as values especially dear to him and considers the right to asylum “an entry point for economic migrants.” He advocates stronger laws, the deployment of the German army domestically and the surveillance of all communication without any restrictions.

There is a connection between Egg’s political activities and the broader drive to transform Humboldt University into a centre of right-wing, militarist ideology, against which the IYSSE has long been warning.

But actions like those on Nov. 8 contribute absolutely nothing to a struggle against such trends. Instead, they create political confusion and supply a pretext for the intervention of the police. They are only superficially radical, while in reality characterised by a deep pessimism, demoralisation and cynicism.

It is therefore not surprising that the Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO) is the only political organisation to thus far support the action. RIO spoke of “brave activists” and accused critics of the stunt of merely shouting “empty phrases” against the right.

This group specialises in covering up its right-wing politics with radical-sounding phrases. The current case is no different. The action against Egg does nothing to help clarify political and historical issues but rather serves to conceal them. RIO hopes that a physical confrontation with AfD members will divert anger at the far right into support for RIO’s allies in the Left Party. The group hopes to direct attention from the fact that it is precisely the right-wing politics of the Left Party, SPD and Greens that is responsible for the rise of the AfD.

There is a long experience with such seemingly radical politics in Germany. Individuals who threw stones and clashed with the police in the 1970s rose in the subsequent decades to the highest offices of the state, led by former “sponti” and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. The petty-bourgeois protesters were never concerned with fighting for a more egalitarian society. They merely wanted to expand their own room for manoeuvre. This could ultimately be better realised through a career in bourgeois politics than by means of occupying buildings and fighting with the police.

Such a political orientation offers no way forward in the struggle against the right. On the contrary. At HU, it is clear that the shift to the right is not simply the result of the activities of a few individuals, but rather expresses more fundamental tendencies within society towards militarism and dictatorship. This can currently be seen most sharply in the United States, where Donald Trump has appointed as his chief strategist a man with direct ties to white supremacist organizations.

When in 2014 the IYSSE demonstrated how professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski falsify history, advocate war and agitate against refugees, there was not a single professor who supported such criticisms. Instead, the institute of history and university administrators tried to silence the IYSSE and intimidate its members.

Baberowski's supporters included Left Party representatives. RIO and other groups wrote nothing about the developments at HU, nothing about the downplaying of Nazi crimes, nothing about Baberowski's agitation against refugees and nothing about the actions of university administrators against the IYSSE. The reason for this is their social orientation. They speak on behalf of privileged sections of the petty bourgeoisie moving ever faster to the right as the capitalist crisis deepens.

The only social force capable of stopping the rightward development is the German and international working class. This is precisely why the professors are so determined to falsify history and cut off working class and young people from its experiences. When Münkler complains about the "democratic vulnerability of German foreign policy," he is expressing a fear of the widespread opposition to war in the population.

To combat the far right, historical and political questions must be clarified. Only on this basis can the working class intervene independently into politics and halt the rightward shift. For this reason, the IYSSE has from the outset linked the struggle against the right with the fight against the falsification of history and right-wing ideology at HU. Dozens of meetings have been held, leaflets distributed and discussions organised to raise the level of political consciousness and orient students to the working class.

Acts of violence against professors only undermine the fight against right-wing ideology and provide a pretext for university administrators to crack down on political opposition.



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