

# The significance of the IYSSE's electoral success at Berlin's Humboldt University

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality  
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The political significance of the electoral success of the IYSSE (International Youth and Students for Social Equality) at Humboldt University extends far beyond the walls of the university. The IYSSE obtained 7.05 percent of the vote in the election to the student parliament, its best ever result.

The IYSSE is the youth movement of the International Committee of the Fourth International, whose German section is the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG).

While the IYSSE was able to increase its vote by a third, all of the other party-aligned student groups lost votes. The IYSSE received more votes than the governing Christian Democratic Union-aligned conservative student group, RCDS (5.61 percent); the student group of the Greens, Grünbolt (4.7); and the Left Party, Linke/SDS (4.5 percent). The Greens and the Left Party are both members of the current Berlin state government. Among the student groups of parties represented in the Bundestag (federal parliament), only the Jusos, aligned with the Social Democrats, obtained somewhat more votes than the IYSSE, with 8.0 percent.

This result is even more significant because the parties represented in parliament have vast financial resources and a considerable public presence at their disposal. At Humboldt University, party-aligned foundations fund hundreds of students and doctoral candidates, drawing them into their political work.

The electoral success thus has objective significance and contains important lessons. It shows that large sections of youth and the working class are turning their backs on the established parties and moving to the left. This not only applies to HU and other universities, but to society as a whole. Workers and youth are coming into conflict with the political establishment, which is responding to growing social inequality and

deepening international tensions with militarism, the strengthening of the state apparatus and austerity.

Under such conditions, the subjective factor assumes decisive importance. The result at Humboldt University shows how the active intervention of a Marxist party, in this case its youth organisation, into political events can change the balance of forces. The IYSSE did not receive these votes by accident, but because it fought for a revolutionary programme and clarified historical and political questions.

In the weeks leading up to the election, campaigners distributed thousands of election statements calling for the construction of an international anti-war movement based in the working class and representing an anti-capitalist, socialist programme. They organised several meetings at which the election of Trump in the US, the return of German militarism and the role played by Humboldt University were discussed, with hundreds of students and young workers in attendance.

From the outset, the IYSSE chapter placed the perspective of international socialism at the centre of its campaign and invited a number of ICFI representatives to the Humboldt University as speakers. On December 16, the group began its meeting series with a lecture by Chairman of the WSW International Editorial Board and National Chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US) David North, on the topic "Where is America going? Causes and consequences of Trump's election." More than 250 people attended.

North demonstrated that Trump was not just some sort of monster blundering into a Garden of Eden, but that his victory was an expression of the decline of American and global capitalism. Therefore, a movement against war and in opposition to the ruling class had to be built on the basis of a socialist programme and required an international strategy. "The

time has come,” North said in concluding his lecture, “To turn to classical Marxism. Marx, Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lenin are more relevant today than ever.”

The tremendous response to the meetings was the product of the political perspective represented by the IYSSE and the systematic work it has developed at Humboldt University over the past three years.

In the ideological preparations for war and dictatorship, Humboldt University is playing an important role. It is a sort of pilot project for the transformation of universities into right-wing think tanks. Already in 2013, it was involved in the drafting of the state paper “New power, new responsibility,” which served as the blueprint for the return of German militarism. The IYSSE pointed out these developments and opposed the right-wing ideology.

The IYSSE focused in particular on attempts to falsify history to justify war and discredit all opposition. Jörg Baberowski, professor for Eastern European studies at HU, has specialised in falsifying and discrediting the October Revolution and the struggle of the Left Opposition against Stalinism. He connects his attacks on the revolution with the relativisation and downplaying of the crimes carried out by the Nazis. “Hitler was not vicious,” he told *Der Spiegel* in February 2014.

The political scientist, Professor Herfried Münkler, has assumed the task of relativising Germany’s responsibility for the outbreak of World War I and connects this directly with an appeal for a more aggressive foreign policy. “A responsible policy in Europe can hardly be carried out if we have the idea that we were to blame for everything,” he said in January 2014. He repeatedly urged Germany to become the “hegemon” and “disciplinarian” of Europe, saying it must rearm. He spoke out in particular for the purchasing of military drones.

By opposing the ideological justifications for war and social inequality being developed at HU, and by defending historical truth against falsifications, the IYSSE laid the basis for a movement against war and capitalism.

This is why the group’s work was at the heart of major political conflicts. All of the large newspapers, from the FAZ to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel*, printed articles denouncing the IYSSE’s work at Humboldt University. The university management,

the management in the department of history and some individual professors also attacked the IYSSE and demanded censorship.

For its part, the IYSSE won growing support among workers and students. It won its first seat in the student parliament two years ago. Last year, it increased its support to 149 votes, and in the latest elections to 192 votes, or 7 percent. The result is a clear confirmation of the correctness of the IYSSE’s work and shows the broad support it has among the student body.

“History has become a battleground,” wrote David North in the foreword to his book *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*. “The ever-mounting conflicts and crises of the twenty-first century are invariably entangled in disputes over twentieth-century history. As contemporary political struggles evoke historical issues, the treatment of these issues is more and more openly determined by political considerations. The past is falsified in the interest of present-day political reaction.”

This applies particularly to the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The conflicts at Humboldt University belong undoubtedly to the battles referred to. The issue is now to take these questions into the working class and arm it with the lessons of history.



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