

Germany: Thousands participate in protests in defence of science

Our reporters
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Protests and demonstrations in support of the global March for Science took place Saturday in 20 German cities, including Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Bonn, Dresden, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Leipzig and Munich.

The biggest demonstration took place in Berlin with around 8,000 people. Demonstrators, including many students, assembled at the entrance to the city's Humboldt University and then marched to a rally held at the Brandenburg Gate.

The rally was supported by Berlin's three universities and a number of other scientific institutions situated in the city. While organisers stressed the non-partisan nature of the protest, one of the main speakers in Berlin was Michael Müller, who has implemented drastic cuts to social and educational budgets after taking over as Social Democratic Party mayor of Berlin in 2014. In Frankfurt the podium at the city's protests also turned over to the city's mayor, Peter Feldmann, also SPD.

Although the protests were originally called in response to attacks on scientific research and environmental protection by the Trump administration in the United States, speakers in Berlin and Frankfurt expressed their concern at the repressive measures against scientific thought and universities introduced by governments in Turkey and Hungary, two countries currently in conflict with the German government.

They made no mention of the way in which universities in Germany are increasingly being reshaped and privatised to further the interests of big business. None of the speakers raised the danger of war, or the increasing integration of universities into the militarisation of German society.

According to the president of Berlin's Free University, Peter-André Alt, the problem was dictatorial regimes such as Hungary and Turkey, rather than democracies such as Germany. The nationalist

orientation of the mobilisation was summed up by the mission statement of the German "March for Science" which noted that "Germany represents only one percent of the global population, but is ... the fourth-strongest economic power. Our prosperity is the product of science, research, technology, and education. Our future is at stake." This a perspective which could rapidly become the rationale for a policy of "Germany First!"

In contrast to the complacency of the speakers on the podium, many participants on the demonstration recognised the danger posed to science and education by the current drive to militarism and war.

Members of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party–SGP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) intervened and distributed many copies of the WSWs perspective "Science and Socialism," as well as copies of the "Open Letter" from the IYSSE to the president of Humboldt University. They pointed out that the march had commenced in the courtyard of the very university where HU president Sabine Kunst was leading a campaign to suppress opposition to the militaristic and far-right positions put forward by professors at the university. Kunst was herself a signatory to the March for Science protest in Berlin.

Lukas is a student from the Czech Republic studying medicine at the HU. He said, "I am opposed to the suppression of free thought at the universities, and it is clear that increased military spending will take place at the expense of social programs and education. I lived in Holland for 10 years and also know that the sort of populism associated with Trump is not exclusive to the US. In Holland it is represented by Wilders and his far-right Party for Freedom, and similar parties are active across Europe.

“The main problem in my own country, the Czech Republic, is corruption. All sorts of projects receive funding from the EU but somehow the money always seems to go missing before the projects get underway.”

Lukas had heard of the controversy at the HU concerning the right-wing positions of some of its professors and was keen to find out more.

At a number of the German demonstrations, including Berlin and Stuttgart, members of the organisation Democrats Abroad were active in distributing propaganda material, arguing in favour of replacing Trump with a Democratic Party alternative. A number of participants in the demonstrations rejected this perspective.

A retired doctor expressed her opposition to those who stated that attacks on science would be solved merely by President Trump exiting office. “The problem goes much deeper,” she said. “Hillary Clinton was just as much a warmonger. She was behind the US intervention in Libya, and it is the Democrats who are now baying for war with Russia. It is intolerable. All of the treaties agreed in 1990 have been swept aside and NATO has moved its troops, including German troops, to Estonia, i.e., on the border to Russia.”

The doctor was shocked to hear that professors at the HU were seeking to revise German history and justify militarism. “The Bundeswehr has no place in German schools and universities,” she declared. “It should be disbanded.”



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