

# Defend the Student Council! Stop the right-wing conspiracy at Berlin's Humboldt University

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei  
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) condemn in the sharpest terms the attack by university President Sabine Kunst (Social Democratic Party—SPD) on the Student Council at Humboldt University and her complicity with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). We support the Student Council's decision not to publish the personal details of politically active students and we demand Kunst's immediate resignation as HU president, as well as the publication of information on and the ending of all connections between the university administration and right-wing extremist circles.

While the presidents of Berlin's two other major universities refused to publish the personal details of politically active students following a request by AfD politician Martin Trefzer, Kunst filed a lawsuit against the students of her own university in late July. She wants to legally compel the Student Council to publish the full names of all council members and their deputies as Trefzer demanded. To carry through the far-right conspiracy, Kunst intends to revoke the Student Council's autonomy and change the statute providing for it that was initially adopted by the students themselves.

If Kunst is successful in carrying out her authoritarian actions, there will be dangerous consequences. The lists being demanded by her and the AfD will be used by right-wing extremist groups to intimidate and attack students with oppositional views. In its press release, titled "HU administration and the AfD against students," the Student Council warned, "We are well known by name by those affected by this—HU students. However, we don't want to be known by our political enemies, who want to slander us."

The president's claim that the suit is merely about legal oversight or avoiding abuse of power by individual student officers is a lie. "When the university administration talks about publishing the names of the council members 'internally at the university,' that means they will automatically go to the AfD," wrote the Student Council. "This is because the university employs AfD members and members of the so-called New Right as teachers, among them Markus Egg and Jörg Baberowski, and, until last semester, Gottfried Curio, who now sits in the federal parliament for the AfD."

Under no circumstances should the names of the Student Council members be published and handed over to the AfD, which enjoys close ties to far-right terrorists and neo-Nazis capable of violence. The university administration also has no right to this information. When students anonymously criticised the militarist positions of Professor Herfried Münkler on the blog Münkler-Watch in 2015, the university administration demanded their names so it could launch a crackdown against them.

It is high time to stop Kunst and the right-wing offensive against

students at Humboldt University! Right-wing extremist networks and authoritarian measures should never again be allowed to prevail at this university, of all places!

Jörg Baberowski, a professor of Eastern European history, is at the centre of the far-right conspiracy at Humboldt University. Baberowski is an internationally known Nazi apologist and ideological pioneer of the far-right. His writings are characterised by the downplaying of the crimes of the Nazis and the Third Reich. "Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table," he told *Der Spiegel* in 2014.

Baberowski's historical revisionism goes hand in hand with the far-right agenda he is pursuing politically. It is now known that he is the organiser of a right-wing extremist discussion circle, which also includes the Social Democrat and racist Thilo Sarrazin; Michael Klonowsky, who is a personal adviser to AfD leader Alexander Gauland; and right-wing publicists such as Dieter Stein (*Junge Freiheit*), Karlheinz Weißmann (*Cato*), and Frank Böckelmann (*Tomult*). Earlier this year, the so-called "Statement 2018" emerged from this fascistic network. It railed against alleged "illegal mass migration" and declared its solidarity with xenophobic demonstrations.

The news magazine *Die Zeit* has regularly carried reports about Baberowski's "right-wing salon." It listed him as part of an entire "New Right network of think tanks," with close ties to the AfD. *Die Zeit* wrote: "For a few years, right-wing intellectuals, writers and publicists have met at a long secretive debating club in Berlin at the initiative of historian Jörg Baberowski ... In private surroundings, Baberowski discussed with his guests the history of Islam in Europe and freedom of speech—and connected conservatives with right-wing extremists."

Baberowski not only exploits his connections in politics, the media and the military to carry out his right-wing extremist agenda, but also the university infrastructure. While he has long listed his anti-refugee interviews, newspaper articles and radio contributions on his HU website, he recently employed the Facebook page of his Department of Eastern European History within the Institute of History to spread the far-right's propaganda.

A 24 July post that has since been deleted ranted in the manner of the AfD or Pegida against the "dictatorship of the moral guardians and the tyranny of the majority," and lamented, "This country is at the end of the road. It will never again recover from the intellectual civil war unleashed by the fanatics. The pact between the republic of virtues and the lawyers of understanding has finally been severed. Perhaps this reality should be recognised and any talks brought to an end. There's no point to it any more."

Baberowski has long been demanding that students critical of his right-wing tirades be thrown out of the university and suppressed by

authoritarian means. He sued the Bremen Student Council in 2017 because it criticized his right-wing standpoint. Kunst, who has been president of Humboldt since May 2016, supported Baberowski's course from the outset. After his defeat in the courts, she released an official statement from the university administration declaring that it would not tolerate any criticism of the "outstanding scholar" and threatening legal action against his critics.

This was a threat to the entire student body, which by a large majority opposes the AfD's far-right politics and the transformation of HU into a right-wing think tank. In recent years, several student organs have adopted resolutions or statements speaking out against Baberowski, Münkler and other right-wing and pro-militarist professors. In April 2017, the student parliament adopted a resolution by a large majority that called on Kunst to "publicly withdraw her declarations of solidarity with Prof. Baberowski" and "unequivocally condemn his right-wing, anti-refugee positions."

Kunst reacted by intensifying her threats. In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, she denounced the students of her own university and sought to portray Baberowski and Münkler as victims of a defamation campaign. Sven Wurm, the spokesperson for the IYSSE, who has warned of the dangerous developments at HU for several years, stated in an open letter to Kunst: "In reality, it is you who are defaming and suppressing freedom of speech. What you falsely portray as defending 'academic debate' is in fact a modern form of state co-option. You want to determine what can and cannot be said at the university, and which regulations should apply. You have no respect for the opinions and democratic rights of the students." He continued: "In terms of content, the issues at stake in the dispute with Baberowski are of great social significance. At stake is the attempt to reevaluate Hitler's role and Germany's crimes in the First and Second World War without any opposition being raised."

Already in February 2014, the IYSSE stated in an open letter to Kunst's predecessor, Jan-Endrik Olbertz (Christian Democratic Union): "The efforts to justify a historically false narrative coincide with a critical turning point in German history. They are closely bound up with the declarations of President Joachim Gauck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier that it is time to end the decades of Germany's military restraint. The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that downplays the crimes of the Nazi era."

With her crackdown on the Student Council, Kunst stands fully exposed as a supporter of this agenda. It is now clear that the appointment of the SPD politician to head Humboldt University was a deliberate political decision. Involved is the defence of Baberowski's far-right network, the accelerated drive to revive German militarism, and the suppression of all opposition to this among students.

Already in earlier positions as president of the University of Potsdam and minister of science in the Brandenburg SPD-Left Party government, Kunst strengthened the influence of right-wing and militarist tendencies at universities. In 2015, she appointed Sönke Neitzel as professor of the German army study programme "War and conflict studies." Like Münkler and Baberowski, Neitzel works systematically to rewrite the history of the First and Second World War so as to whitewash the crimes of German imperialism and prepare new ones. In a recent interview in the magazine *Zeit Geschichte* titled "Learn from the Wehrmacht?" he praised the tradition-setting role of Wehrmacht soldiers for the German army's military interventions in the post-World War II era.

Kunst's actions at Humboldt University correspond to the grand coalition's right-wing agenda and the SPD's role within it. With its decision to continue the grand coalition, the SPD consciously chose to make the AfD, which won only 12.6 percent of the vote in last year's federal election, the official opposition, so as to strengthen the far-right's influence and implement its programme in practice. The doubling of the defence spending, brutal social spending cuts across Europe, and a

crackdown on refugees are central to the grand coalition's programme, along with the strengthening of the repressive powers of the police and the suppression of any domestic left-wing or socialist opposition.

The current report by Germany's domestic Secret Service (Verfassungsschutz), which was published a few days ago with a foreword by Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union), reads like a document from the AfD's party headquarters. The AfD is presented as a "victim" of alleged "left-wing extremists," and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is officially listed among the "objects under surveillance" by the Secret Service. Its "misdeed" is not "left-wing extremist" violence, but rather its public advocacy of a socialist programme against "the existing state and social order, invariably slandered as 'capitalism,' against the EU, supposed nationalism, imperialism, and militarism."

The parallels to the 1920s and 1930s are striking. As then, the ruling elite is responding to the deep crisis of capitalism, extreme levels of social inequality, and mounting conflicts between the major powers with anti-democratic and authoritarian forms of rule. It is deliberately encouraging the growth of far-right forces to enforce their reactionary policies against mounting opposition within the population.

Hitler did not come to power in 1933 by riding a wave of popular support, but by means of a conspiracy involving influential figures in politics, business and the military. After the Nazis suffered a major defeat in the 1932 parliamentary elections and were plunged into crisis, President Paul von Hindenburg, who was elected with the support of the SPD and the Centre Party, appointed Hitler chancellor on 30 January, 1933. Two months later, all of the bourgeois parties voted in parliament for the Enabling Act, which laid the basis for the Nazis' terror regime.

Today, the influence of the far-right over the ruling elite's policies stands in even greater contrast to the views and convictions of the vast majority of the people. The AfD does not have a mass base but is viewed with deep hostility. In May, tens of thousands protested in Berlin against a march by the AfD, which managed to mobilise just 2,000 supporters from across the country. In the workplaces and universities, the AfD and the ruling elite's right-wing policies are despised. According to a recent poll, 67 percent of the population is concerned about the rightward shift of German politics.

The IYSSE urges all students not to be intimidated by Kunst's threats, but instead to organise a powerful counter-offensive. Humboldt University cannot be permitted to be transformed into a centre for right-wing extremist and militarist propaganda, as it was prior to the First and Second World War. All measures against politically active students must be withdrawn and a student-led investigation initiated into the activities of right-wing extremist networks at HU.

The following questions must be answered:

- To what extent and by whom were the right-wing activities at Humboldt University financially supported?
- Are or were university rooms made available for Baberowski's "right-wing salon?"
- Which other members of the teaching staff participated in the meetings with Baberowski?
- What discussions took place between Kunst and the grand coalition, or the SPD-Left Party-Green coalition in the state of Berlin, about protecting Baberowski from criticism?
- Was the crackdown on left-wing and critical students coordinated with the Verfassungsschutz, which describes any criticism of capitalism in its latest report as "left-wing extremism?"

To stop the right-wing conspiracy at HU, the IYSSE appeals to all students, university clubs and academics who are not prepared to allow the return of German militarism to proceed unopposed: Organise protests and demonstrations at HU and other universities to demand the resignation of Kunst and Baberowski!

The chief task is to mobilise support among the working class, to inform workers about the dangerous developments at Humboldt University, and win them to a socialist programme against war, capitalism and fascism. Make contact with the IYSSE and SGP, and help to organise this struggle!

War and fascism, never again!

Scholarship, not war propaganda!

Stop Kunst, Baberowski and the right-wing extremist conspiracy at Humboldt University!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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