

# Open letter by students condemns right-wing offensive at Berlin's Humboldt University

**International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany)**  
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Opposition among students to the right-wing offensive at Humboldt University in Berlin is growing as the new semester begins. In an open letter to the HU administration, student representatives and groups from educational institutions across Germany have condemned right-wing attacks on the student body.

Among the signatories to the letter, in addition to the IYSSE, are the state conference of student councils in Berlin, student councils from the universities of Hamburg, Bremen, Potsdam, Hannover, and Leipzig, the Alternative-Green List at Humboldt University (Grrünbolt), the List of Non-Dogmatic Left-wing Students, the departmental council for social sciences at HU and the Free Coalition of Students (FZS). They all call upon university administration “to withdraw its lawsuit against the student council, the enforced changes to statutes, and the overturning of decisions by the student parliament.”

In July, HU president and Social Democrat politician Sabine Kunst filed a lawsuit against the student council, at the behest of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), because the council refused to divulge the names of its members to the AfD. The background to this was a parliamentary question submitted by the AfD in the Berlin state senate demanding to know the names of all student representatives on councils at universities in Berlin. The reason why the far right is collecting such information is obvious: they are creating anti-communist and racist “enemy lists,” so that they can intimidate and persecute political opponents.

While the administration at the Technical University and Free University rejected the AfD’s demand, the HU administration embraced it enthusiastically. To formalise the obligation to publicise all names, Kunst even threatened to change the statutes of the student representative body. Ever since, the university’s administration has continued to intensify its offensive against its own students. They have not only called into question the decisions taken by the student parliament, but also all the democratic rights and social provisions obtained by the student body.

In a lengthy letter sent to the student council on 20 August, the university’s legal department demanded sweeping changes to the 2014 administrative agreement. This agreement governs the relationship between the university’s student representative bodies and HU.

The major areas being targeted include the student council’s social programs, such as its advisory program on student loans and social issues, childcare services, departmental councils and student societies. The university intends to demand rent from all of these institutions in the future. Student events would also be affected by this. According to its own figures, which suggest it conducts around 1,500 consultations per year, the student council’s student loan advisory service is the largest in Berlin, apart from the Berlin branch of the nationally active Studierendenwerk charity. The demands for rent are deliberately aimed at torpedoing support services for students who need help with social issues or childcare.

The letter explicitly states, “The university is not obligated to advise students on social, economic, legal, or health issues.” Childcare is also “not the HU’s responsibility.” The presidium also claimed that departmental committees existed for no reason. At HU, there are departmental councils, which are officially elected, and departmental committees, which are organised on the basis of grassroots democracy and are open to all students. The latter—the majority of all departmental representative bodies—are now under attack.

The holding of student elections is also to be made more difficult. Thomas Eschke from the legal department wrote that the free postage of documentation for postal ballots must “inevitably be placed under review.”

Earlier this year, the email distribution system “HU-an-Studis,” which served as a platform for exchanging views and communicating with students, was shut down. The university administration thereby removed the student council’s most important means of informing students about the university’s attacks and mobilising students against them.

Another component of the attacks on students was the

recent announcement of plans to cut the jobs of 600 student employees, or outsource them to a private contractor. It was no accident that two of the first jobs left unfilled as part of this initiative were two posts in the student council's social advisory service.

In their open letter, the students "condemn...the escalating and scandalous attacks of the HU administration on the autonomy of the student body and all attacks on the rights of students as a whole." They point to "a qualitatively new stage in anti-student policies, which can be understood only in connection with the broader shift to the right in society, and is part of many more attacks against the student body in Berlin and students across the country."

The close collaboration between Kunst and the far right was underscored again recently by the provocative appearance of AfD parliamentary deputy Martin Trefzer at Bebelplatz, where the book burnings took place under the Nazis in 1933. In an AfD propaganda video, Trefzer, who is not only the AfD spokesperson for academic affairs, but is also chairman of the scholarship and research committee in the Berlin state senate, denounced the student council and stressed his close collaboration with the university administration. "The HU president promised me that something would be done, but the student council has refused to cooperate so far," he said.

The main reason for Kunst's aggressive crackdown against left-wing students is that she is covering for a far-right network that exists at HU. The initiator of this network is Professor Jörg Baberowski, one of the most well-known ideologues and power brokers of the New Right. Baberowski's "right-wing salon" includes figures like Thilo Sarrazin, Dieter Stein (Junge Freiheit), and Michael Klonowsky, personal adviser to AfD leader Alexander Gauland.

Already last year, Trefzer and the AfD applauded "the presidium of Humboldt University" for having "opposed the slandering of renowned professor of Eastern European history Jörg Baberowski." Kunst and the AfD denounce as a "slander" the criticisms made by students of Baberowski's right-wing extremist positions, and those of other professors.

This fact was also stressed by the spokesman for learning and teaching, "well-known and high-ranking AfD members and right-wing extremist intellectuals have been working at HU for years," wrote the student representatives on Twitter. "Instead of distancing themselves from them, university administration always comes to their defense."

Due to the support from the university administration, Baberowski has been empowered to conduct his right-wing extremist campaign ever more aggressively. While he claimed in *Der Spiegel* in 2014 that Hitler 'was not vicious,' he now declares his solidarity with the neo-Nazi

marches in Chemnitz. He attacked the 70,000 participants in the "rock against the right" concert in Chemnitz at the beginning of September, writing on his Facebook page, "It is depressing, this always-having-to-be-correct, the ruthlessness with which diverging views are morally discredited and shot down." The "diverging views" in Chemnitz consisted in witch-hunts against foreigners and attacks on a Jewish restaurant!

In another posting, Baberowski insulted the student union at the University of Bremen, against which he launched an unsuccessful lawsuit, as a "bunch of extremely repugnant denunciators and illiterates." The reason for his violent outburst was that the student union in Bremen is conducting a campaign against a right-wing student with ties to the neo-Nazi NPD.

The close cooperation between the university administration and the AfD, which is aimed at defending Baberowski's right-wing extremist network and suppressing all student opposition to it, marks a dangerous precedent directed against all students. This is shown by developments in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia, where the AfD is also demanding lists of student representatives and explicitly referring to the example of HU to justify their demand. To the extent that the federal government and all established parties integrate the AfD and adopt its policies, the universities are also being co-opted into adopting this line.

The IYSSE calls upon all students to protest against these right-wing attacks and organize a powerful counter-offensive in the new semester. The HU and other universities throughout Germany cannot be allowed to be transformed into centers for right-wing extremist and militarist propaganda as they were prior to the First and Second World War.

We demand that all measures against politically active students be withdrawn and a student-led investigation convened into the activities of right-wing extremist networks at the HU. Kunst and Baberowski must resign!

In the coming semester, the IYSSE will organize protest events at HU and other universities. We will also inform students and workers throughout Germany and internationally about the dangerous developments at HU, and mobilize support for a socialist program against fascism, war, and capitalism. Contact us to find out more about our planned activities and to take part! Study our program at [iysse.de](http://iysse.de), and become a member of the IYSSE!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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