

Against the right-wing attacks of university administrators and the far-right

Successful solidarity event for the student union of Humboldt University

Our reporters
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On October 25, 200 students came to the meeting “Defend the student union against the right-wing attacks of the university administration and the AfD!” in the main building of Berlin's Humboldt University (HU). The youth and student organization of the Fourth International, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), together with the student unions of the universities in Potsdam and Bremen, had called for solidarity with the RefRat, as the student administration at HU is known.

The appeal for the meeting evoked a powerful response because many students oppose the harassment and intimidation of the RefRat by the university administration at the behest of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The large turnout was an expression of political strength and a clear sign that students are willing to defend their democratic rights and fight against the right-wing danger.

At the beginning of the meeting, RefRat members Tim and Michi said they were pleased with the invitation to the event by the IYSSE. “We are especially happy that so many of you are here today.”

The two speakers informed those present about the legal action being taken by the university administration against the elected student body and showed how its content was consistent with a motion tabled by the AfD in the Berlin House of Representatives (state legislature). In particular, the request for the university administration to publish lists of names of all active students in the RefRat could be directly linked to the motion tabled by the AfD. For this reason, the president of HU had brought an action against the RefRat in July.

Tim also reported that students were being exposed not only to political but also to social attacks by the university administration. For example, student employees at HU have for years been systematically paid far below the applicable wage rates, resulting in serious financial problems for some.

As Michi added, the actions of the university represent a social development in which “increasingly authoritarian behaviour against democratic and critical structures [is]

legitimized.” In the name of the RefRat, Michi called for “solidarity from the student body and other student unions.” The RefRat would continue to resist handing over lists of names to right-wing extremists.

Fabian, the representative of the AStA (student union) at the Free University of Berlin (FU), followed on from Michi's report about the character of the universities as “business enterprises.” Fabian compared the list of names demanded by the HU presidium with AfD websites in Berlin and Hamburg, where students are called on to denounce their teachers. The AfD was deliberately seeking out information about its opponents, using further parliamentary motions.

Fabian referred to the case of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) officer Franco A. and the right-wing terrorists of the National Socialist Underground (NSU), among whom extensive lists of names of potential targets were found. Furthermore, critical students and the AStA at the FU were confronted with systematic attacks by the university administrators.

Irina, who had travelled to Berlin on behalf of Bremen's AStA, reported how extreme right-wing forces were increasingly acting openly at her university. They felt encouraged because their ideas were being made acceptable again, she said.

For example, representatives from the neo-fascist German National Party (NPD), the AfD and the Identitarian Movement had put in an appearance during the orientation period for first-year students on campus. The Bremen AStA, however, had gone on the offensive and is confronted with increasing attacks by the university administration. The administration had also refused to defend the AStA when it was sued by right-wing HU Professor Jörg Baberowski.

At the beginning of his contribution, the IYSSE speaker at HU, Sven Wurm, took up the remarks of the RefRat representatives. The sheer mass of attacks by university administrations against the social and democratic rights of students had attained a new quality. Sven stressed that it was important “to understand why the attacks take on such a

massive form today.”

He addressed two appeals to students. First, they should not underestimate how far the development of the right wing had progressed in the universities and in society internationally. “We aren’t just talking about a development at HU,” he said. Second, Sven called on those present to participate in building a movement against the right-wing attacks that are taking place everywhere.

He agreed with the RefRat that the opposition must come from students themselves. On the other hand, there was a deafening silence among academics, journalists and in establishment political circles. However, as a member of the IYSSE, Sven said he was not surprised by this. In the fight against representatives of the extreme right, the IYSSE had already made similar experiences.

In 2014, in the newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, the chair of East European history at HU, Jörg Baberowski, had attested that Hitler was “not vicious.” And when he downplayed the Nazis’ war of extermination in Eastern Europe, this remained completely unchallenged. The IYSSE was the only one to oppose Baberowski’s systematic relativizing of the crimes of the Nazis in his works and his pursuit of an extremely right-wing political agenda. The university administration, academics and leading newspapers had subsequently organised a campaign to falsify the IYSSE’s views and silence its representatives.

Sven went into more detail about the social context to the rise of the far right. With the entry of the AfD into the Bundestag, an openly extreme right-wing party was sitting in the German parliament for the first time since the end of the Nazi dictatorship. Its chairman, Alexander Gauland, recently described this dictatorship as merely “bird shit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history,” and only a few weeks ago he wrote a guest article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that paraphrased one of Hitler’s speeches. Unlike the Nazis, the AfD today possesses no mass movement on the streets. However, given the massive support for the AfD from the state apparatus, the government and wide sections of the media, the rightward development was no less dangerous today. As in the 1930s, a socialist perspective was needed to stop the right wing and prevent a catastrophe.

Sven said many of the participants must have asked themselves the question, “What would I have done 85 years ago?” This question was again posed today: “I think we have to face this today and have to anticipate the question of the next generation: ‘What did you do?’”

The developments of recent years have shown that one cannot simply rely on “things turning out right in the end.” Students had to take the fight against the right wing into their own hands. “We can defend the universities and the RefRat only if we develop as broad a counteroffensive as possible.” He called on everyone to take part in this fight, to continue discussions, to come to the students’ plenary meeting next Wednesday and to

the meetings of the IYSSE at HU.

Afterwards, a lively discussion developed. Students from other universities pointed to similar developments. A student from the University of Leipzig reported how the local university administration had defended the nationalistic comments of the law professor Thomas Rauscher. A petition against Rauscher had gathered 18,000 signatures.

Another pointed to the case of Martin Wagener, professor of international politics at the Federal College of Administration in Munich, who in a recent book called for the establishment of a “postmodern frontier system,” with walls, pits and barbed wire at the German border.

The attempt by a small group of right-wing provocateurs and officials of the AfD organisation, “Young Alternative,” to disrupt the meeting failed miserably. On the contrary, their vulgar behaviour only caused disgust among those present. Several participants protested against those seeking to disrupt the meeting and called for them to be isolated.

Other participants asked questions about the characterisation of the actions of the HU administration as a “far-right conspiracy.” In his reply, Sven explained that the term was not chosen randomly, but represented what had actually happened. In view of the massive opposition to right-wing extremism in the population—which was also expressed in the large attendance at the meeting itself—the policy of the government, which has largely taken over the programme of the AfD, increasingly assumes the character of a political conspiracy.

He referred to the book, *Why are they back?* by Christoph Vandreier, deputy chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP), recently published by Mehring Verlag. This systematically explains the nature of the “right-wing conspiracy.”

Even after the official end of the meeting, discussions continued in the corridors for a long time. Members of the IYSSE stressed that although the meeting had been a great success, it was only an important impetus for a broader mobilisation to defend the universities against right-wing attacks, which must ultimately be raised to an international level, and for the mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme. Many students left their contact details to be kept informed about a planned networking meeting and regular IYSSE meetings.



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