

Stop the censorship of socialist views by the University of Leipzig student council

The IYSSE Leipzig
30 October 2019

The student council at the University of Leipzig refused to grant the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) official club status last Tuesday, effectively imposing censorship on left-wing and socialist views on campus. While several openly right-wing groups were recognised and received rooms for meetings with right-wing extremist ideologists, the IYSSE, which is resisting the rise of the far-right, will have no rights to book rooms or set up campaign tables on campus.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality is a movement of students and youth fighting around the world against the far-right, the growth of militarism, and its roots in the capitalist system.

The IYSSE is well known in Germany for its struggle against far-right and militarist ideology on university campuses. It has sharply criticised the right-wing extremist positions advanced by Jörg Baberowski at Humboldt University in Berlin, Thomas Rauscher at the University of Leipzig, and other professors. For this, the IYSSE has been attacked and slandered by the media, political parties, and universities, but a number of student councils and other representative bodies have supported the IYSSE's positions.

The student council at the University of Leipzig is now joining hands with far-right forces with the intention of banning any criticism of them on campus. After all, without the official club status from the student council, a student group cannot hold meetings, set up campaign tables, or conduct any political activity on campus.

The student council already refused two years ago to grant the IYSSE official club status. At the time, the IYSSE wrote in an open letter to the student council, "While the RCDS (the student movement of the Christian Democrats), who invited the right-wing

extremist professor Jörg Baberowski to the University of Bremen, will receive free access to rooms, you are censoring critics of their politics. You are thereby creating a campus where the right-wing can flourish while Marxist politics is banned. This recalls the voluntary co-option of the universities by the state under the Nazis."

This assessment has been vindicated time and again in the period since it was written. While the IYSSE and other left-wing groups were banished from the campus, right-wing groups like the RCDS or the Free Democrat-aligned "Free Campus" have held a series of meetings, including with Werner Patzelt, a sympathiser of the far-right pegida protests.

For its part, the student council organised a meeting on campus last May with the declared AfD supporter Thomas Maul. Only after a number of students spoke out against the invitation to Maul did the student council retreat from its official role as organiser. However, it continued its solidarity with the event's organisers. Maul declared, among other things, that the AfD was the "only voice of reason left in Germany's parliament."

By contrast, the IYSSE was not permitted to hold its meeting entitled "Stop the rightward shift at the universities" in a university room.

Members of the student council employed explicitly right-wing arguments to justify this censorship. One representative justified his opposition by stating that the IYSSE opposes the nation state and thus the German Federal Republic, and that it describes the grand coalition as the most right-wing government since the Second World War. Apparently, such things cannot be said at the University of Leipzig. Another representative justified censoring the IYSSE by saying that the group advocates socialist principles and is anti-

capitalist. He could not take moral responsibility for that, he added.

The attack on the IYSSE is being led by the Jusos, the youth movement of the Social Democrats, whose members spoke the longest and most aggressively at the meeting. They declared, among other things, that the IYSSE could not be supported because it had warned against the universities' voluntary co-option into the state. This was historical revisionism, the SPD representatives claimed.

According to this logic, someone who warns of the threat posed by the far-right is a falsifier of history, while those who trivialise the Nazis' crimes and justify their actions are not. This is an argument normally used by the AfD and other right-wing extremist groups against their critics.

A Jusos member also noted that the student council would be in conflict with university management if it granted official club status to the IYSSE. They would be "picking a fight with the people we are unfortunately dependent upon," according to the SPD youth member. Discussions are obviously taking place between members of the student council and university management on how socialist and left-wing student groups can be kept off campus.

At the beginning of the discussion, the Jusos member also claimed that the IYSSE was "hardline anti-Semitic." This was the chief accusation levelled against the IYSSE two years ago. IYSSE spokesperson Christopher Lehmann described this as an "outrageous lie" designed to justify the censorship of a left-wing and anti-fascist group.

As part of the world Trotskyist movement, the IYSSE has consistently waged a determined struggle against all forms of anti-semitism, he added. By contrast, members of the student council distorted the IYSSE's anti-capitalist stance, its criticism of the policies of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and its opposition to a nationalist perspective as anti-Semitic, said Lehmann. This is not only absurd, but represents a trivialisation of anti-Semitism, which almost produced a massacre in Halle. Following Lehmann's response, the student council representatives dropped the issue.

The censorship of the IYSSE and other left-wing groups at Leipzig University is totally unacceptable. Its goal is to clear the path for right-wing forces by

prohibiting all criticism of them. This is particularly significant in the state of Saxony, where the AfD is the second largest party in parliament and the state intelligence agency and police have close ties to right-wing extremist forces. The attack in Halle was an unmistakable warning.

At the federal level, the parties in the grand coalition made the AfD the official opposition in parliament and are implementing its right-wing programme. The federal government has established a widespread network of deportation camps for refugees, strengthening the intelligence agencies and police, and preparing for brutal wars, as can be seen currently in the Middle East.

Anyone who criticises these policies or publicly opposes the AfD faces the full wrath of the intelligence agencies and the state apparatus. For example, the intelligence agency in Saxony described those who attended a concert against right-wing extremist violence in Chemnitz as "left-wing extremists." The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), whose youth movement is the IYSSE, is slandered in the Secret Service Report as "left-wing extremist" because it opposes capitalism and nationalism.

The youth organisations of the government parties, which fail to even come close to a majority among students, are exploiting their positions to impose censorship on university campuses. They want to silence anyone who criticises government policies and resists the far-right.

We therefore call upon all students to oppose this attack on democratic rights. Make contact with us, send us protest letters, and attend our meetings.



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