

German student organisation bombarded with far-right hate mail

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The student's association (Asta) at the University of Hamburg has been bombarded with hate mail and threats of violence after students protested against a founding member of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Bernd Lucke, who returned to his teaching post at the university.

On October 24, one day after Lucke delivered a second lecture, 500 people were evacuated from the main building of Hamburg University following the threat of a bomb attack on those protesting Lucke's return. The threatening letter had been posted to the university and stated that three bombs would be used to "fumigate" the "left-green pack of trash" and "elitist parasites and bums." The letter was sent by "SS-Obersturmbannführer Türkensau" (a combination of a Nazi officer rank with a racist slur) and signed off with "Heil Hitler" and "NSU 2.0"—a reference to the neo-Nazi terror group, the National Socialist Underground.

The media in Germany have played a key role in fuelling the campaign against students, while remaining largely silent about the campaign of far-right terror against students. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke recently to Karim Kuropka, chairperson of the Asta at the University of Hamburg.

"The bomb threat was just one of more than 300 hate mails the university received," Kuropka said. "Upon closer inspection most of the mails came from the milieu of the AfD in the state of Baden-Württemberg—so it seems to have been a coordinated action. In addition, our Asta received between 70 and 160 threatening mails, many addressed to me personally."

The anonymous agitators threatened to "whip" students and beat their "dumb immigrant mugs" and photos of leading Asta figures were posted on Nazi websites. "We are now systematically checking all

emails and their contents to assess whether we can lay criminal charges," Kuropka reported.

"The swastikas carved into the windows of the Asta premises are very threatening and raise serious doubts about whether one is still safe at night on campus. Hearing of the threats made against the student association at Humboldt University (RefRat) in Berlin, or the fact that the Asta at the University of Rostock is on a death list [drawn up by the far-right terrorist group, Nordkreuz], it's incredible that there is barely any mention made in the media."

On the contrary "misrepresentations in the media" have only helped to incite the neo-Nazi rabble against students, Kuropka said. "I have found out that the media have actually poured oil onto the fire. Facts have been twisted and statements made by me and others completely distorted."

Kuropka's statement that Lucke does not belong "in a university" had been reinterpreted into a general demand for a ban on occupations. "Right-wing newspapers such as the FAZ and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* have also tried to discredit me personally, by asking how long I have studied or whether, as a German studies student, I have any understanding of economic issues."

The media presentation of the student protests also had little in common with what actually took place. According to Kuropka, the Asta initially registered with the university and police a rally in front of the main building featuring a number of speakers. The subsequent protests in the lecture hall were not organised by the Asta.

"This was then extensively and misleadingly reported in the media. First of all, students began chanting and clapping rhythmically and Asta members were then asked by students to intervene and quieten things

down.”

Lucke then sat down among the students, which many regarded as a provocation. When he reached out again for a microphone it was torn out of his hand. “We asked him several times to just go peacefully, and after this last incident, he left the lecture hall. Someone from Asta placed himself protectively in front of Lucke to allow him to leave.”

Regarding the role of the police, Kuroпка said: “The police, who were standing in front of the door with an entire squad, were able to repeatedly establish that there was no danger to life and limb—at no time. When Lucke came out of the building, they escorted him anyway. That was completely unnecessary, nobody planned to attack him. That’s how the photos emerged which then dominated the media.”

This was then the background to a systematic hate campaign by the AfD, the German government and the media against the Hamburg students, which included an intervention in the form of a television interview by the federal education minister, Anja Karliczek (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). All of these forces declared incessantly that the protests against Lucke represented a threat to the freedom of expression.

“In the case of Lucke, this claim is particularly perplexing,” Kuroпка noted, “because he was able to complain about not being able to express his opinion in a leading newspaper with a national readership. The fact that he then compared himself to Jewish professors during the period between 1928-1939 is the height of impudence.” This is how the crimes of the National Socialists and the Holocaust are relativised.

“In my opinion, freedom of expression does not mean that misanthropic views or those based on falsities should not be criticised. The university lives from criticism. And it must be possible to express criticism—against anyone. This includes professors. Anyone who tosses off a thesis must be prepared for the thesis to be opposed. Whoever has the best arguments in the end wins the debate. That’s the way science works.”

In reality, freedom of opinion is being attacked from the right. The campaign to defend “freedom of expression” for the right wing is ultimately an attempt to limit the right to oppose views one does not agree with. This could in fact lead to the abolition of free expression. “That’s the question that should be

addressed,” Kuroпка said. “The right-wing wants intolerance to be tolerated. But one should not fall into this trap.”

The Hamburg Higher Education Act states that a task of the student body is “in particular to promote the ‘political education’ and ‘civic sense of responsibility’ of students and ‘commit themselves to basic and human rights.’ In that sense, it is of course our job to express our opinions regarding right-wing teaching,” Kuroпка said.

This passage had been included in the Hamburg education law after World War II at the insistence of the Allies based on the experience at German universities under the Nazis, when professors did not feel able to express criticism of fascism and oppose right-wing developments in future. “When one listens to the statements by Professor Bernhard Kempen, then this passage is clearly appropriate. The very term ‘ideological terrorist’ is idiotic, an absurdity. As a Germanist, I feel like pulling my hair out at such a comment.”

Kempen, a lawyer, is president of the German University Association. In an interview with the television program “Kulturzeit” on August 28 he denounced student criticism of right-wing professors as “ideological and ethical terrorism.”



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