

IYSSE, student unions defend students in Germany against right-wing attacks

Our reporters
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Last week, nearly 100 students at Berlin's Humboldt University and representatives of student organisations from numerous other universities met to protest against right-wing and militaristic teaching and defend students who criticize it from right-wing attacks.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) initiated the event and organized it together with the student unions.

The student representatives took stock of the attacks on the rights and freedom of expression of left-wing students and discussed perspectives in the fight against the right-wing danger. Representatives of the IYSSE and student unions (AStA) from Hamburg, Bremen and Berlin, as well as at Humboldt University, introduced a joint resolution that was unanimously adopted by the assembly.

The enormous response to the event was evident from the beginning, when several messages of solidarity were read out from other AStA and also from plenary assemblies of students at Humboldt and the Free University in Berlin, each of which had been passed by a large majority.

The first student representative to describe the situation at his university was Leo Schneider, social affairs officer of the Hamburg AStA. An incident three weeks ago was symbolic of the tense situation, he explained.

"Three weeks ago, six police officers in riot gear came into a university building, walked down the corridors, entered a seminar room and picked out a student. All the students present were shocked."

The student had previously been banned from the building because he had told police officers guarding a lecture by the founder of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Bernd Lucke, "We're not going to storm the hall."

That was sufficient to justify such martial action. The student was banned from attending his seminar and ran the risk of not being able to receive credit for it.

"According to the University of Hamburg," Schneider said, "Lucke had to be allowed to lecture whatever the price. Even if students were to be pulled out of seminars by the police."

Bernd Lucke, who has resumed teaching at the University of Hamburg this semester, was met with a massive protest by students when he returned. "Lucke's statements are racist, and he repeatedly agitates against minorities of any colour, which is why we call him the right-winger who has no fear of contact with right-wing radicals," Schneider explained. "That is the reason why we at the University of Hamburg at least do not want to offer him any shelter, and why we organized a demonstration."

"What surprised us was the wave of hatred we faced, which was partly driven by media reports," Schneider said. "Members of the AStA faced personal hostility."

He cited the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* as an example. As a result of press agitation, the AStA received "massive death threats," including a bomb threat from the neo-Nazi NSU 2.0. "The police are pulling students out of the lecture hall, but we were not offered any protection. There are even

investigations against members of the AStA."

Feline Schleenvoigt of the Humboldt University Refrat (Student Council) reported how the right-wing radical Professor Jörg Baberowski blamed student representatives for the fact that his application for a "dictatorship research centre" was rejected by the Academic Senate (AS).

In a media campaign, the rejection of this right-wing think tank had been described as an "attack on freedom of opinion." When two student representatives of the Academic Senate defended their criticism of the centre in a radio report, Baberowski smeared them as "incredibly stupid" and "left-wing extremist fanatics."

"We were all frightened by the shit storm that broke out in social media," Schleenvoigt said. "It was directed against the Refrat in general, but also very personally against the two student representatives. Information about the families of the two, including photos, was assembled on right-wing blogs. It was actually quite scary to see what was going on with a professor who was still being supported by the university administration, which continued to insist that he was not a right-wing radical."

One of the student representatives of the Academic Senate aptly remarked, "Even though the university continues to deny that Baberowski is a right-wing radical, the right-wing radicals themselves know very well that he is one of them. You can see that in every post."

The role of the university administration had already been apparent more than a year ago, when it sued the RefRat at the behest of the AfD for publication of the names of all students active in the RefRat over the past 10 years. "When you see how right-wingers collect names and how even information about our families is collected, it's quite frightening," Schleenvoigt said. "The university shows it is supportive of right-wingers."

It was not simply about Baberowski, but about how right-wing views can be made socially acceptable again, the student emphasized. "The university leadership has a neo-liberal, authoritarian strategy, which seeks to suppress any debate."

The police operation against the occupation of a lecture hall at the Institute for Social Sciences also showed this. While the university administration uses the police against critical students, not a word is said about flyers from right-wing terrorist organizations on campus.

Thomas Scripps of the IYSSE in Britain spoke about similar developments at British universities. At the end of 2018, Noah Carl was given a prestigious job at Cambridge University. Scripps said that 1,500 students and academics protested in an open letter because Carl openly advocates eugenicist and racist positions. For example, he explains terrorism and poverty as the result of genetic differences of ethnic groups.

Carl is part of a right-wing extremist academic network promoted by the ruling class, Scripps said. He had supporters and fellow thinkers all over the world, such as Professor Heiner Rindermann of the Technical University Chemnitz, who claims that global inequality is due to genetic differences.

“In the fight against this right-wing extremist campaign, appeals to scientific reason can have a lasting effect only if they go hand in hand with a progressive, socialist programme,” explained Scripps at the end of his contribution. “Falsification and pseudoscience, even if untrue, can gain increasing influence because they are encouraged and supported by reactionary forces that are growing stronger every day under conditions of the global crisis of capitalism.”

Fascist movements in which such ideas prevail are promoted to enforce social inequality and imperialist violence, Scripps said. “To fight them, we must defend historical and scientific truth, based on a much stronger social force that represents opposed social interests: the international working class, which is now entering into mass struggles against social inequality, imperialism and war.”

Irina Kyburz of the University of Bremen AStA explained that the rise of right-wing extremist forces, as discussed on the podium, could be understood only in the context of a broader right-wing climate.

“Nationalism was not invented by Baberowski or the Nazis. The division into Germans and non-Germans, and people with more and fewer rights, more for Germans and fewer by degrees for non-Germans—that is what the bourgeois state does every day: permanent right of residence with a work permit, without a work permit, temporary leave to stay, etc., up to deportation to war zones.”

Dario of the Beuth University of Applied Sciences explained why he used only the abbreviation of the name of his university—because the eponymous Peter Beuth had been a fervent anti-Semite. “Even though we have proven this, there is still no real sensibility about it at the university,” he said. He added that leaflets from the right-wing radical Identitarian movement had appeared on campus and there were professors at the university who were members of the AfD.

Furthermore, he noted, the university was developing infrasound and drone systems together with the German Armed Forces and the police. And the cooperation went even further.

Bundeswehr soldiers are trained at the university, Dario explained, because parts of the Bundeswehr universities have closed. However, this is not being financed by the defence budget, as is customary, but by the education budget. “We are trying to enforce the civil clause at our university,” which precludes funding military projects, concluded Dario.

The IYSSE spokesman at Humboldt, Sven Wurm, summarised the issues and explained the perspective of the Trotskyist youth organisation. “We have been fighting here at Humboldt University for six years against right-wing extremist teaching and the relativisation of Nazi crimes,” he said.

“Even at the outset, the IYSSE stated that it was not a question of a single professor, but of the right-wing shift of the entire political establishment. While the radical right-wing professor was defended by politicians and the media, the critical students were attacked.

“Today we see it all over the country. Anyone who opposes the rise of the extreme right is to be silenced,” Wurm said. As an example, he cited the fact that no one defended the Hamburg students against death threats, but all of the establishment parties took a stand for Lucke because he had paper shavings thrown at him.

This was an expression of a fundamental development, the IYSSE spokesman stressed. “In order to impose their policies of war and social inequality, rulers all over the world are returning to authoritarian and ultimately fascist methods,” he warned.

Wurm went into detail about the right-wing policies of the German government, its aggressive war policy and stepping up of the powers of the repressive state. “Five years ago, these policies were still exclusively the preserve of the AfD,” he noted. “Today it is government policy, which is also supported by the Greens and the Left Party in the federal states.”

Unlike in the 1930s, however, the ruling class had no mass base for such policies. “The vast majority is against war and inequality and will not

allow a return of fascism. This can be seen here today at the meeting, but it can also be seen all over the world. Mass protests against social inequality are the order of the day everywhere in the world,” Wurm said, pointing to protests in Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran against social inequality and imperialism.

“It is this massive social force, the force of the working class, which is the only one capable of resisting the shift to the right,” Wurm concluded. “But for that it needs a socialist perspective. That is what we fight for as the IYSSE.”

The contributions were followed by a lively discussion, which continued in the corridors and at the information table. At the end of the meeting, all of the participants unanimously adopted the following resolution, which had been tabled by all panel members:

We oppose any form of right-wing radical teaching at the universities, especially the relativization of Nazi crimes, racist incitement against refugees and militaristic research.

It is completely unacceptable that right-wing and far-right professors such as Jörg Baberowski and Bernd Lucke receive support from the media, the political parties and the university administration, while students who protest against right-wing teaching are attacked and intimidated.

The vast majority of students reject this development. We will not allow the universities to again become centres of right-wing and militaristic ideology, and therefore express our unconditional solidarity with the students attacked in Hamburg, Berlin and other universities.

We take the following principles to be self-evident:

1. The right of students to protest against right-wing teaching. No return to the authoritarian professorial university!
2. The right of left-wing and progressive groups to work on campus and hold events!
3. Never again war research and right-wing agitation at the universities!



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