

“How war and dictatorship are prepared at universities”

Well-attended online meeting concludes IYSSE election campaign at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Our reporters

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Last week, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) organized an international panel discussion at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) titled “75 Years after the Second World War: How war and dictatorship are being prepared at universities.”

The event marked the culmination of the IYSSE’s campaign in this year’s student parliament election at KIT. It was broadcast live on the internet and watched by an audience of about 150 people. Many of those in attendance participated in the discussion that followed a series of speeches.

Moderator Philipp Frisch, a member of the IYSSE in North Rhine-Westphalia, placed the event in the context of current political developments. “When we talk today about the preparation of war and dictatorship at universities,” he said, “we do not do so in a vacuum, where universities are a kind of island of erudition.”

Frisch referred to the social and political impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mobilization of fascistic paramilitaries against peaceful demonstrators in the US, and the recent announcement by the German grand coalition government, consisting of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, of plans to introduce “voluntary military service.”

In the first contribution of the evening, Katja Selin from the IYSSE in Berlin explained how the universities are centrally involved in the preparations for war and dictatorship. “The universities have become political battlefields,” she said. “The ruling class is striving to make them centres of militaristic and right-wing extremist ideology, as in the First and

Second World Wars. Nowhere is this more true than at Humboldt University in Berlin.”

There, Selin said, the IYSSE has opposed the falsification of history by professors such as Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski, who told *Der Spiegel*, “Hitler was not cruel.” In this struggle against militarism and for historical truth, the IYSSE has received broad support among workers, students and young people.

Selin explained that “the shift to the right in Germany comes from above, and Professor Baberowski is a key figure in this.” Baberowski, she noted, has played an important ideological role in relation to the “central questions around which official politics have moved rapidly to the right in recent years.” This has involved the falsification of history and promotion of war, as well as agitation against refugees and rationalizations in support of dictatorship.

For this reason, the right-wing extremist professor was still being defended vehemently by the university administration, the university association (Hochschulverbund) and the federal government, even after he attempted to sabotage the IYSSE’s student government election campaign at Humboldt University in January and insulted and physically attacked a member of the IYSSE.

The entire controversy at Humboldt University made clear “that a socialist perspective and an orientation towards the international working class are necessary to counter the rise of the extreme right,” Selin concluded.

The speech by Thomas Scripps, a leading member of the IYSSE in Britain, evoked particular interest.

Scripps stressed that the struggle of the IYSSE at Humboldt University had been vindicated by events in Germany in a very short time. A similar process, he explained, was taking place at leading universities in London, where an international network of academic racists, backed by the British government, was working systematically to rehabilitate eugenicist positions.

“The increasing promotion of Social Darwinist ideology in science and politics finds its political expression in the ruling class’s murderous response to the coronavirus pandemic,” Scripps said, referring to the policy of so-called “herd immunity.” Although most openly expressed by Boris Johnson, it is an international phenomenon, he stressed.

The ruling class in every country, Scripps said, is reacting to the explosive growth of international class struggle by reviving all the ideological filth of the past. He cited as an example the fact that the German Social Democrat Thilo Sarrazin, in his xenophobic agitation, had been able to rely, among other things, on the writings of Professor Heiner Rindermann of the Technical University of Chemnitz.

In the third and final speech of the evening, Gregor Kahl, an IYSSE member at KIT and candidate in the student election, spoke of technological war preparations at the university. He explained that dozens of KIT professors were in contact with military research institutes of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, a leading applied research organization, and worked closely with arms manufacturers and representatives of the armed forces on campus.

Professor Beyerer, chair of Interactive Real-Time Systems at KIT and consultant for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), was only one example. Most recently, Beyerer announced his intention to make “substantial contributions” to the development of the European FCAS air combat system and the MGCS Franco-German battle tank system.

“The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology is certainly one of the centres of German war weapons research,” Kahl concluded, emphasizing that a vote for the IYSSE was therefore of great importance, particularly at KIT.

The contributions were followed by a lively discussion on a wide range of political and historical issues: from the silence of the professors to the growth of the international class struggle and the revolutionary optimism of the IYSSE. There was as well discussion

on the lessons of twentieth century history and the significance of the Russian Revolution.

At the conclusion of the meeting, IYSSE candidate Kahl stressed, “We are now entering a period that will be marked by enormous international class struggles, and in this situation it is crucial to build a revolutionary party in the working class so that it can fulfil its historical role. This party is the International Committee of the Fourth International and its youth and student movement, the IYSSE.”



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