

Academic boycott of Russia: Science in the service of German war policy

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Following the reactionary invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military, the highest levels of German academia are taking measures against Russia that are unprecedented in post-war history. In agreement with the German government, leading research institutions and universities have severed all relations with Russian partner organisations and announced that all ongoing research projects will be put on hold.

Only hours after the intervention began, the Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) announced that “all current and planned” cooperation, “scientific exchange” and all “previous, long-standing cooperation in science and research as well as in vocational training” would be frozen immediately and that there would be “ongoing coordination with the Foreign Ministry and the Chancellery.”

Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger (Liberal Democrats, FDP) justified the step by saying that the country had “taken its own leave of the international community” and would have to bear “serious consequences.” The Russian intervention was “a blatant breach of international law and cannot be justified by anything.” However, she made it clear to broadcaster Bayrischer Rundfunk that her ministry’s actions were part of a “systemic confrontation” that required the “Bundeswehr [armed forces] to be strengthened” and to “think differently in geopolitical terms” in the future.

Almost at the same time, the “Alliance of German Science Organisations” published a statement “strongly supporting” the “consistent action of the Federal Government” against the Russian government. The Alliance includes the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Fraunhofer and Max Planck Societies (MPG), the Helmholtz and Leibniz Associations, the German Rectors’ Conference, the National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the government-affiliated Science Council.

The joint statement urges all member institutions “to freeze scientific cooperation with state institutions and business enterprises in Russia with immediate effect until further notice, to ensure that German research funds no longer benefit Russia and that no joint scientific and research policy events take place.”

According to the statement, “no new cooperation projects are

to be initiated at present.” Further steps would be discussed “in close consultation with the federal government and other political decision-makers.” The measures are tantamount to breaking off all official academic relations with Russian institutions.

In the days since publishing the declaration, the academic organisations have outdone each other with anti-Russian boycott measures, which despite protestations to the contrary, are no longer directed solely against Vladimir Putin’s regime. The scientific and cultural damage caused by these steps is immeasurable and deeply reactionary.

On Wednesday, for example, the DFG confirmed that with “immediate effect, it is suspending all research projects” between German and Russian scientists that it funds, that it will not accept any German-Russian cooperation or continuation proposals, and that it will not review proposals that have been submitted. In existing cooperation projects, moreover, “no data, samples and equipment as well as other scientific material are to be exchanged” and “no joint events are to be held.”

The presidium of the Max Planck Society, which has not uttered a word of criticism of Western-led wars in the past 30 years, reacted with a one-sided appeal to Russia to immediately cease hostilities in Ukraine. MPG President Martin Stratmann called Russian President Vladimir Putin a “dictator” who “blatantly threatens the peoples of Europe with a nuclear strike” and announced that he would not tolerate any staff who publicly supported the Russian president.

On the same day, the DAAD decided to halt “application opportunities for Russia scholarships” and to cancel “selections for DAAD scholarships to Russia.” German scholarship holders who have already been selected will also be unable to receive financial support for a stay in Russia at present. There are approximately 750 cooperation projects and 100 DAAD scholarship holders in Russia.

The service, which is close to and funded by the Foreign Ministry, also expects German universities to immediately “suspend all DAAD-funded project activities with partner institutions in Russia and Belarus.” This threatens to bring university exchanges between Germany and the two countries to an almost complete standstill.

Several state rector’s conferences, as well as countless

individual universities and colleges, have already put most or all their academic relations with Russian institutions on ice. A survey by Forschung & Lehre names, among others, the three universities in Berlin, the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, the Bauhaus University in Weimar as well as the universities of Brandenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg.

The University of Erfurt even went so far as to suggest that for the next two semesters, Russian students should not come to Germany. As the state rectors' conferences explained in public statements, the measures were taken in each case "in consultation with the Ministry of Science."

The comprehensive boycott of Russian science by Germany's academic establishment is unique in Europe and of hardly foreseeable consequence. As reported by *Die Zeit*, the German action threatens projects such as the €3 billion construction of the particle accelerator FAIR (Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research in Europe), polar and climate research, the international nuclear fusion reactor ITER—and even the Geneva-based particle physics research centre CERN, where almost 900 scientists from Russia are currently working.

Helmut Dosch, head of the German Electron Synchrotron (DESY) in Hamburg, was particularly aggressive. He compared the Russian invasion to "September 11" in *Die Zeit* and declared: "When the free world is attacked by a neo-imperialist kleptocrat, we hit back with full force."

He said that to prevent technology transfers to Russia "at all costs," he had already halted all collaborative projects, had withdrawn papers submitted to journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, and had arranged for visiting Russian scientists at the institution to leave Germany by the end of last week.

Punishing Russian academics and students for a government policy that is rejected by a large proportion of them has no progressive content whatsoever. On the contrary, it is an aggressive act, accompanied by a furious anti-Russia campaign in culture and public life, designed to demonise everything Russian and to put science at the service of foreign and war policy.

DAAD President Joybrato Mukherjee, for example, stressed to journalists that his service's actions were part of an "overall strategy of the German government and the European Union to isolate Russia." In the face of a "huge foreign, defence and security policy challenge" the likes of which "have not been seen in Europe since the Second World War," he said, "investing in our defence readiness and investing in foreign cultural and educational policy are not opposites."

Referring to a DAAD key issues paper from October last year, which had called for the development of a strategy to "manage unavoidable refugee movements" in "fragile contexts," Mukherjee demanded a "gigantically large support programme" from the federal government on Tuesday. It should "strengthen the anti-government forces" in Russia, bring Ukrainian scientists to Germany and set up "leadership

programmes for future leaders" who "will take on leadership tasks in Ukraine after the situation stabilises later on."

The fact that the top echelons of the German academic establishment are so willing to go along with Berlin's war policy against Russia brings back memories of the darkest chapters of German history and, at the same time, confirms the struggle of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) against the transformation of universities into compliant cadres of German militarism.

As early as the Weimar Republic, the DFG, in particular, had supported anti-Slavic propaganda on which the Nazis' war of extermination was based. After the Nazis were brought to power in 1933, key DFG scientists welcomed Hitler's regime and joined in its aims of their own free will. The Nazi's Volksforschung ("people research") and research into "racial hygiene" funded by the DFG to the tune of billions, culminated in the drafting of the "General Plan East," which envisaged the extermination of the Slavic population in Eastern Europe and was put into practice in the Nazis' war of extermination.

After Hitler came to power, the professors of the Weimar Republic swung behind him, practised self-imposed conformity, expelled Jewish academics from their ranks and enthusiastically participated in the mobilisation against the Soviet Union. Even today, it is professors like Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski who are whitewashing the historical crimes of German imperialism to promote a third German grab for world power.

The DFG database lists no fewer than nine funding projects in support of Baberowski—a professor who portrays the Nazis' war of extermination as the result of the Red Army's conduct of the war. As for Münkler, he recently called in *Die Welt* for European nuclear warheads for "a new order of great power rivalry."

We call on workers, youth and scientists to protest against the measures being imposed and to contact the IYSSE and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) to oppose the subordination of scholarship to German war policy and to prevent a third world war.



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