

Student Parliament election campaign

Students at Berlin Humboldt University speak out against rearmament and right-wing violence

Our reporters

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As part of the ongoing election campaign for the Student Parliament (StuPa) of the Berlin Humboldt University (HU), members and supporters of the International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) discussed with hundreds of students the immense rearmament of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces), the war politics of Germany and the other imperialist powers and the right-wing attacks against critical students at the university.

The Trotskyist youth and student organization is running in the elections “to build a socialist movement against war, social inequality and the rise of the extreme right,” as formulated in its election statement. At its first election campaign event this coming Monday, the group will demand: “Stop the war! €100 billion for education and health instead of for rearmament!” The group will engage all interested parties to discuss the danger of a third world war and the necessity of an international anti-war movement.

Moreover, the IYSSE faction in the StuPa has written an open letter to the university administration protesting its support for the radical right-wing professor Jörg Baberowski. Baberowski uses his position at the university to agitate against refugees, drum for brutal wars and trivialize Nazi crimes. In the course of the 2020 StuPa elections this professor physically assaulted an IYSSE deputy.

“I find it really crass that someone like that is allowed to continue teaching,” said **Franziska** (24), who is studying elementary education in German, mathematics and science at the HU. “I myself am dealing with teaching the topic of National Socialism and the Holocaust in elementary school and don’t think that this is covered by ‘freedom of teaching’.”

She also opposes the recently announced 100 billion euro for the Bundeswehr. “I don’t think such an armament program is right, especially when I think about the pandemic

and its economic consequences.”

“Because the rents are so high, I still live at home and my parents are both in the at-risk group [for the coronavirus]. I’ve had to restrain myself a lot because under no circumstances did I want to put them at risk. I would invest a lot of that money into these totally outdated schools. The kids would get so much out of it! You could make up so many deficits if you invested even a portion of that money there, and into health care!”

Annkathrin studies Public Health at the Charité [Berlin’s premiere medical center] and says: “I have a very negative feelings about the Sondervermögen [the €100 billion Bundeswehr program], in a pan-European perspective but also in the context of German history.

“It completely contradicts my basic pacifist standpoint. One hundred billion is such a huge amount that you can’t even grasp it. There are so many areas that need that much and more but don’t get it, for example health care, education or climate protection!”

Carla is a freshman social science student at the HU. “I think it’s crass that this money is just suddenly available, but nothing is done about urgent problems like poverty and climate change. One hundred billion would be the minimum to stop climate change, strengthen education and fight social and global injustice.”

The cost of war, Carla said, is being passed on to workers in every possible way: “Taxation is unfair anyway. Now everyone is being asked to pay again, even though the poor suffered more than the wealthy during the coronavirus pandemic anyway.

“I don’t think that arms deliveries end wars; on the contrary. With all these arms deliveries, I worry about a spiral of violence. The Greens haven’t been an anti-war party for a while now.

“It also scares me that we are steering toward World War

III. Especially the FCAS [Future Combat Air System] is pushing the limits; the [fighter planes] can drop nuclear bombs. I reject giving Germany the ability to fight a nuclear war.

“But I would not support the Americans either. There’s a lot of ideology on the NATO side, too, and you shouldn’t believe everything they say.”

At HU’s Adlershof campus, members of the IYSSE spoke with **Nina**, a student in computer science. Asked about the German government’s war policy, she says, “They’re preparing for war and want to make money by supplying [Eastern European] countries with tanks.

“You should invest the money in education and health, support children and single parents. Many children and old people are waiting for vital treatments. There are many things the money could go to.

“You could also raise wages. They always say, ‘We don’t have the money,’ but then they have money for weapons. It’s going back in the direction of 80 years ago. Germany wants to have power over other countries and all of Europe again.”

Regarding Baberowski, Nina asks, “Who hired him and why is this person still working at the university? Is he that important to his degree program? I don’t know why the university allows this to happen and doesn’t act. It’s wrong in every way!”

She adds: “As a student, I would feel like a second-class citizen if someone did this to me and the university administration did nothing about it. I wish you the best of luck and hope you achieve your goals and that many students support you.”

Students from other universities likewise spoke to members of IYSSE on campus. Ali is studying industrial engineering at University of Applied Science (HTW) and says, “Every country is pursuing extreme rearmament right now. Investments in it are increasing year by year. There is an arms race.”

“It’s inexplicable to me to buy weapons,” Ali says. “If I had my way, these industries would be eliminated entirely. If that eliminates billions in profits, so be it. I think it’s very good that more and more people are speaking out against this, and I hope more and more will.”

“There needs to be much more transparency and much more enfranchisement in voting. You could start a worldwide poll: Do you agree that 100 billion should be invested in weapons? If society decided where the money should go, over 50 percent would be against that.

“Common ground must be found and promoted in so many areas. The goal must be to make borders invisible and to act globally, regardless of whether it’s against war or against climate change.

“Because of the internet there could be much more social participation. You could have global voting rights. The technology is there, but it’s not desired because the current rulers would lose their positions.”

Regarding Baberowski, Ali says, “I don’t think such people move with the times. History has shown that in our times there is no way forward through nationalism. It’s the same with capitalism. Everyone knows it’s at its end.”

Haroun, who speaks to us in English, already knows the IYSSE from his studies at technological institute in Karlsruhe (KIT) and supported them since that time. He is now studying at the Technical University in Berlin and rejects the war and German rearmament.

In Egypt, where his parents live, there is a lot of sympathy for Russia, he says, because people have seen enough of the lies and “human rights” hypocrisy of the EU and the United States. “The same governments that are now attacking Russia in Ukraine have been silent on Palestine for years,” Haroun says. “I myself think little of the Putin regime. It is just as capitalist.”

Felix studies economics at Freie Universität in Berlin. He says, “As NATO, we already have 70 times the arsenal of Russia, and Europe is already a fortress. Russia’s army has proven to be a ‘paper tiger’ in Ukraine, according to some experts. That makes talk of ‘deterrence’ all the more absurd.

“In reality, it is about the imperial aspirations of a given ruling class. The average citizen has no benefit from rearmament and even less to gain from conflict. The logic of imperialism should be rejected across the board.”

Regarding the HU leadership’s behaviour in the Baberowski case, Felix says, “It is ridiculous that the HU still protects such people and retains them in its ranks. What else does he have to do before they distance themselves from him? I’m really not in favour of restricting discourse. But a line should be drawn here: He leaves an imprint on a lot of people, and what he represents is obviously misanthropic.”



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