

University students in Berlin condemn historical falsification and right-wing violence

Our reporters
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The election campaign of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) for the student parliament (StuPa) of Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin is finding great resonance among students. Amid the escalating war in Ukraine and the unprecedented rearmament of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces), there is growing interest in a socialist and internationalist perspective against the historical falsification and militarism taking place at universities. IYSSE deputy Sven Wurm's open letter to the HU presidium is cause for lively discussion in the lecture halls, outside the library and in the dining halls on campus.

In the run-up to the July 7 online event "How the return of German militarism was prepared at HU," members and supporters of the IYSSE spoke to hundreds of students about German war policies, great power politics and the concrete danger of a third world war. Countless students spoke out vehemently against the right-wing and militaristic positions of professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski, condemning the attacks on critical students and the complicity of the university administration.

Ahmed studies agricultural sciences at Humboldt University and arrived as a refugee from Syria in 2015. "I notice that Nazis have a lot of power here," he tells us. Ahmed compares Baberowski's viewpoints, which relativize the Holocaust and trivialize Hitler, to the viewpoints of a "Nazi." The professor himself is "obviously an extremist," he says.

Ahmed is "absolutely shocked" by the conduct of the university management: "How can they defend him? He physically assaulted a student and paid €4,000 for it. That is unbelievable! A verbal attack would have been bad enough. If nothing is undertaken against Baberowski, then we clearly have a right-wing university leadership."

Finn is studying law at Humboldt University. He describes Professor Jörg Baberowski's right-wing historical revisionism as "shocking": "It's already very close to Holocaust denial when you trivialize Nazi strategies. Something like that is bottomless historical falsification, contradicts a scientific worldview and has no place at a

German university.

"I find it dangerous that with his reach Professor Baberowski can influence so many people. The fact that he gets in a physical altercation with a student should be reason enough to part with him—I find paying €4,000 is pretty harmless for something like that. Openly right-wing extremist positions are becoming respectable again, and I find that shameful. The book burnings took place right here at Bebelplatz. There are still no memorial plaques for the Jewish professors. That all happened here."

On rearming the Bundeswehr with a "special fund" of €100 billion, Finn says, "There are deep historical reasons why Germany turned away from the military after the war. That cannot simply be discarded overnight. The Bundeswehr has shadow armies in its ranks—you can't pour €100 billion into that kind of right-wing organization and just see what happens."

Celina, who studies biology at HU, says of Baberowski and Münkler's positions: "That's bullshit. It can't be that someone knows what happened and still says, 'Hitler was not vicious.' That's a repulsive opinion, I think. Such people have learned nothing from German history." She says the discussion about German and European nuclear weapons is "an affront": "They should vanish worldwide."

Enrico, who studies at the Berlin Technical University, says: "The money for the Bundeswehr will be missing in other places where there is already a shortage of money. Much more money should go to social aid and schools. Because if schools are not equipped, more and more people will not learn what happened and what must never happen again. This must not be forgotten."

Referring to the war in Ukraine, Celina adds, "Wars are ultimately profitable for a lot of people. The economy gains from it. The people who do the real work suffer from it and pay for it with their lives and the lives of their loved ones."

Zoe is also studying law at Humboldt University, having done her pre-university schooling in Hamburg. "Everyone knows Baberowski is a right-wing guy," she tells us. "We went through his right-wing theories about the Russian

Revolution in school. Our teacher criticized it, but the material was handed down from above. I'm embarrassed that I'm studying at the same university. This guy must be removed immediately. HU pretends to be progressive, but this is the exact opposite."

"Right-wing violence is apparently not taken seriously in this society," Zoe says. "It's disrespectful and terrible to relativize the Holocaust like this—toward students, but also toward the people who suffered under Hitler."

Zoe rejects the German rearmament and arms deliveries to the Ukrainian military: "I believe that there are economic interests and other negative interests behind this. As a normal citizen, you can hardly see through that. In any case, the arms industry profits."

"For students, far-right professors are a central issue and I welcome that," says **Nicola**, who studies cultural and social sciences at HU. "Suppression of critical students is something we've had before. A new wave of students is rejecting that."

"The level of abuse of power and the shift in discourse is scary. At a state university in 'perpetrator country,' historical revisionism is becoming something you can talk about again. It's crass that there is apparently a culture at the university that normalizes all of this and makes it without consequences."

"German militarism is flaring up again. The world political situation is being used to pass rearmament measures without democratic discussion. This has been planned for a long time," she explains and warns:

"When I see the scandal about the Nordkreuz Network, I wonder who is being financed and what is being built up. It's really threatening: lists of names are being drawn up, weapons keep going missing. There are no oversight bodies. The security authorities are an apparatus of the fascists."

IYSSE members and supporters also spoke with students from other universities about these issues.

Leonie studies African culture and society in Bayreuth and says: "It is hypocritical of the university management to take a stand against racism and then tolerate such a professor. The consequence is that historical revisionist ideology continues to be taught. It's crazy that even with something like this [a physical assault], there are no consequences."

"In general, right-wing structures in society are covered up. It is frightening when the police and the Bundeswehr get more heavily armed, especially for foreigners and people of color. One can only be ashamed of the rearmament. For me, the USA has always been the worst example. Germany is emulating the USA in every way and is increasingly acting as the world's policeman. It's unbelievable that we claim the right to intervene militarily everywhere."

"The war in Ukraine was not surprising and is no different

from the wars waged by the US, Europe and Russia in recent decades," Leonie says. "Instead of solving social problems, Germany spends billions of euro to kill people in other countries. With €100 billion you could raise the wages of so many caregivers."

"I don't find it surprising that there are far-right professors in Germany," says **Monica**, who studies Interdisciplinary Latin American Studies at the Freie Universität. "Germany has long been 'Europe's leading power,' exploiting the global South and profiting from most wars. The government has only been waiting for something like the war between Russia and Ukraine. It is used to justify pouring billions into the Bundeswehr, which are being cut in all other areas."

"I really can hardly believe it, pumping money into weapons," says law student **Johanna**: "Whenever it comes to the pandemic and social things, the 'black zero' [balanced budget] has to be maintained—but then the money is there for war."

"As if we didn't have other problems: you could expand renewable energies, promote social housing and get inflation under control. You could also invest money to fight right-wing violence. The billions could have been better invested in everything else."

Regarding right-wing professors and the ideological war offensive at universities, she explains, "Münkler's statements sound like he could join the AfD [the far-right Alternative for Germany party] right now. What does he mean by saying that Germany should be 'disciplinary of Europe'? What Baberowski says is simply absurd, you can fire him straight away. That has nothing to do with teaching anymore, but rather right-wing propaganda. Such people have no place in a university context."



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