

Stop the censorship of the IYSSE anti-war meeting at Goethe University in Frankfurt!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany)
8 May 2023

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) demands that its meeting, “The war in Ukraine and how to stop it,” be allowed to go ahead at Goethe University in Frankfurt. The Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG, protestant university parish) is attempting to illegally cancel the room it rented to the IYSSE on the Westend campus, justifying this by citing the youth organization’s anti-war positions.

The IYSSE meeting in Frankfurt is part of an international series that have been held at universities around the world, including 13 universities in the US, four in Australia and New Zealand, two in Sri Lanka, two in Canada and one in Brazil. Speakers from Russia and Ukraine have participated in several of these gatherings, standing together against Russia’s war and its provocation and escalation by NATO, and to discuss the perspective of international socialism. In Germany, the IYSSE has already held successful meetings at Humboldt University in Berlin and in Munich.

Last Thursday, a few days before the meeting planned for May 12, the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde announced it would not allow the event to take place in its rooms, despite a valid contract and the hire charge being paid. The IYSSE is planning to take legal action against this act of censorship of war opponents and hold the event as planned, but it is crucial to take political action against it now. Students who oppose war must not let themselves be censored while the university is increasingly placing itself at the service of militarism.

The reasons given by the ESG to declare a valid contract null and void demonstrate that it is a crude form of censorship. The church institution wants to prevent the acute danger of a nuclear world war and the deeper causes of the Ukraine war from being discussed

critically at the university. This is not only directed against the IYSSE, but against all critical students and opponents of war.

In its justification, the ESG quotes from an IYSSE statement: “Universities must not be turned into militaristic think tanks, but must remain places of scholarly work and political debate.” This sentence, according to the ESG, speaks of “little confidence in the university’s ability to engage in discourse,” and was contrary to the ESG’s commitment to “freedom of teaching and research.”

Especially in Germany, it takes an inconceivable historical amnesia to twist the defence of scholarly discourse against the militarization of universities into an attack on the “freedom of research and teaching.” German universities were the willing allies of the Nazis and had already played a central role in preparing ideologically for the armament campaign before the First World War. Critical voices were muzzled. If the ESG wants to forbid students from warning against such a development, it places itself in this dark tradition.

As a second reason for terminating the use of its premises, the ESG states that the IYSSE represents “a materialist conception of history... at the centre of which is a scientific understanding of politics and history and the working class as the only revolutionary force in society.” This contradicted the views of the ESG “of plurality and the divine image of every human being.”

In what way a scientific understanding of politics should contradict with plurality, the church does not elaborate. The Marxist orientation of the IYSSE and its policy statement were known to the ESG before the contract was agreed, and the IYSSE has held events in its rooms before. The current concerns about a

materialist view of history clearly stem from the desire to banish anti-war positions from campus.

Dr. Anke Spory, who signed the letter to the IYSSE, is executive pastor of the ESG Frankfurt and provost of Oberhessen. She told the IYSSE that the cancellation followed discussions in the regional church. But the connection with the militarization of the university is obvious.

Frankfurt's Goethe University has systematically put itself at the service of militarism for years. The influential "Normative Orders" research centre headlines its homepage with a call to "#StandWithUkraine," completely detaching Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine from its historical and political roots.

Goethe University was already represented in the project "New Power—New Responsibility" in 2013, through politics professor Gunther Hellmann, which had initiated the German government's about turn in foreign and security policy and Germany's return to great power politics. Hellmann is the editor of the 2015 Security Conference documentation, "Earlier, More Decisive, More Substantive. The New Debate on Germany's Foreign Policy," as well as a volume of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) 2016 White Paper.

At the end of April, Frankfurt professor Susanne Schröter made national headlines when she invited racist Boris Palmer to what was supposed to be a scholarly conference at her Global Islam Research Center (FZGI), providing him a platform for his racist tirades.

While these militaristic and racist positions are financed with vast sums of money, students are to be forbidden from criticizing them. And this is then sold as "freedom of teaching and research."

This attack on democratic rights is linked to the militarization of the whole of society. The German government is using Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine to set in motion the biggest rearmament since Hitler. It is deliberately escalating the war to inflict defeat on the nuclear power Russia on the backs of the Ukrainian population and to appropriate Russia's raw materials. In doing so, it also accepts the possibility of a nuclear confrontation.

While this return of German militarism is propagated through all channels, the majority of the population rejects it. The horrors of two world wars, fascism and

the Holocaust are too deep-seated. That is why democratic rights are under fire and critical voices against war and rearmament are suppressed.

In France, the Macron government is using extreme brutality against mass protests. In Berlin, several Palestinian demonstrations were recently banned. In Frankfurt itself, a concert by the anti-war activist and musician Roger Waters was to be banned under the false pretext of anti-Semitism, and the latter was only able to prevent this though legal action.

Defending the right of students to criticize the prevailing policies of militarism and war at public meetings is of utmost importance under these conditions. If the ESG prevails, students would no longer be able to openly criticize the right-wing and militaristic positions of their professors and would no longer be able to speak out against the madness of a third world war.

We therefore call on all readers to protest against this act of political censorship. Write protest emails to the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (mail@esg-frankfurt.de) and send a copy to iysse@gleichheit.de so we can publish it on our website. Come to the event on May 12 at 6:30 p.m., which we expect to hold as planned in the ESG hall on the Westend campus, Siolistr. 7 (Haus 3), 60323 Frankfurt.



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