Protest emails oppose censorship of IYSSE meeting at Goethe University in Frankfurt

11 May 2023

We are publishing here a selection of protest emails from readers sent to the Evangelical Student Community (Evangelische Studierendengemeinde, ESG) to protest against the political censorship of the IYSSE at Goethe University in Frankfurt. After the IYSSE discussed the censorship on campus, and upon receiving these letters, the ESG withdrew its ban on the meeting.

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Dear Sir or Madam,

Since the Second World War, large sections of the Protestant Church have been committed to opposing German participation in war, rearmament and militarism.

They stand in the tradition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other courageous and righteous Christians who refused to submit to the Nazi regime. While there have always been those in the church who have blessed and advocated weapons, it has been part of democratic standards that peace activism has had a permanent place in the church.

What worries me greatly is the fact that for at least a year all activities against rearmament, arms deliveries and war participation have been downright suppressed and persecuted. The examples are many, the professor in Kiel who lost his teaching job, a journalist from MDR with her commentary against tank deliveries to Ukraine, etc.

I cannot understand the ESG's reasoning for cancelling the premises. There are no arguments that justify the cancellation from a legal or ethical-moral point of view. To me, it looks as if the ESG has bowed to pressure from forces that currently have a problem with opposition to the war. I find this embarrassing and unacceptable. If we had bowed to any pressure back in the GDR, no decades of peace and no change would have been possible.

When there is a legally binding tenancy agreement, then there have to be very good reasons for refusing. After all, we have been taught the basic principle of the capitalist system clearly enough: "Pacta sunt servanda." It is not necessary to agree 100 percent with all the positions of the IYSSE.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Bautzer

Theologian and teacher of religion

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Dear Sirs and Madams,

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the United States condemns the censorship of the upcoming anti-war meeting of the IYSSE (Germany) by the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde at Goethe University. We demand an immediate reversal of the cancellation of the lecture, "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it," and for the meeting to proceed in a free and democratic manner.

The IYSSE is the only student organization in the world that is clearly explaining the historical roots of the war in Ukraine and advocating a strategy to unite workers and youth in Ukraine, Russia and internationally to put an end to war. In the US, we just concluded a powerful series of meetings covering these themes at 13 campuses across the country, which were warmly received by students and youth opposed to the escalating war in Ukraine and the threat of nuclear war.

Efforts by academic officials to block a left-wing, socialist perspective against German militarism mark a return to the darkest days of the Third Reich, in which the campuses became centers for imperialist propaganda. We will do everything in our power to raise awareness of this anti-democratic development among students and youth in the US, and build opposition on every campus at which we are active.

Sincerely,

The IYSSE in the United States

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Dear Sir or Madam,

At yesterday's meeting of the Public Service and Postal Action Committees, we adopted the following statement of solidarity.

Yours sincerely,

Dietmar Gaisenkersting

Solidarity Statement

We stand in solidarity with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), who are currently organising an international series of meetings titled "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it."

In Frankfurt, the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG) is trying to illegally cancel the room booked for the meeting on the Westend campus, justifying its decision with the anti-militarist stance of the youth organisation.

At several other IYSSE meetings, the organisation's international perspective has been expressed by speakers from Russia and Ukraine speaking together against Russia's war and its escalation by NATO.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands are being sent to their deaths in Ukraine and Russia.

We are supposed to pay for the war and rearmament with major wage cuts in our contract bargaining negotiations.

The discussion on how to stop the war is absolutely necessary. We therefore demand the ESG rescind its decision and allow the IYSSE to hold its meeting at Frankfurt's Johann Wolfgang Goethe University as announced.

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The Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG) is censoring the rights to free speech and assembly, in particular of socialists and anyone who would like to inquire about and consider the point the point of view of socialism for stopping the war in Ukraine. That being the subject of the meeting, the cancellation of the room at Goethe University in Frankfurt rented by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is consequently an act that has international consequences in acting to limit an international series of meetings being held against the threat of the development of a Third World War.

As I have taught history for 24 years in New York City schools, and my mother's family with her eight brothers and sister, each with spouses and children, were killed by the German military in Auschwitz, I can only consider this political attack on democratic discussion a historically repulsive act, even more so as German Leopard tanks are now once again

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rolling into Ukraine toward Russia.

Even the denial of space at Goethe University has a quality of the maliciously absurd, as Goethe would surely have approved of the inquiry by the IYSSE into the history of US/NATO provocations that led to the criminal invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime, considering he wrote:

"In any case this business of hatred between nations is a curious thing. You will always find it more powerful and barbarous on the lowest levels of civilization. But there exists a level at which it wholly disappears, and where one stands, so to speak, above the nations, and feels the weal or woe of a neighboring people as though it were one's own."

The ESG tries to justify its anti-democratic stance saying the IYSSE was acting contrary to the ESG's commitment to "freedom of teaching and research" but it rather evokes the condemnation expressed in that novel of great credit to German literature, *All Quiet On The Western Front*, which points to the treacherous consequence of institutions of education acting to accommodate and support the military 'solutions' the ruling classes impose on humanity.

Social justice demands that ESG rescind its cancellation of the IYSSE use of the room at Goethe Univesity in Frankfort. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Harvey Lichtman

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Dear members of the Protestant Student Community,

I was very surprised to hear you want to cancel a meeting of the IYSSE against the war in Ukraine, due to take place on Friday at the University of Frankfurt. You complain that we are opponents of the militarisation of the universities and that this attitude is contrary to your principles. Are we to conclude, therefore, that you support German militarism and reject critical discussion about it?

Your sudden action against our meeting is undemocratic, completely unprincipled and legally unfounded. In times of war and attacks on democratic rights, meetings at universities where criticisms can be raised are more important than ever. When you claim that cancelling student meetings is in line with the "freedom of teaching." then one not only shakes one's head in astonishment, one also recalls those dark times when professors could do whatever they wanted and students had to accept the results without criticism. How will you explain your response to students in Frankfurt and elsewhere who have planned to participate in our meeting? Should we tell them that unfortunately the Protestant Church does not tolerate criticism of German military policy on its premises?

Our public meetings against the Ukraine war have met with great interest worldwide and have given many students the confidence that a world without war and social inequality is possible. I presume therefore, that following our meetings in Munich and at Berlin's Humboldt University, the meeting in Frankfurt can also take place as planned.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Link

International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the Humboldt University, Berlin

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To the Protestant Student Community in Frankfurt:

With this letter I protest in the strongest terms against the censorship exercised against the anti-war campaign of the IYSSE at the Goethe University in Frankfurt-am-Main and demand you withdraw the illegal cancellation of the room in which they intend to hold their meeting.

The reasons you give for doing this (you cite a lack of confidence in the university's ability to conduct discourse and a "scholarly understanding of politics and history") are either plain wrong or simply confirm that the IYSSE should be given every opportunity to discuss this war with Goethe University students.

The IYSSE explicitly advocates that the question of war, the causes of the current war and the acute dangers arising from its escalation, be discussed. However, it does so on a scientific basis that stands in stark contrast to the ubiquitously circulating, mindless pro-war propaganda. It has full confidence in students' ability to seriously discuss the burning political issues raised by the war in Ukraine.

Your arguments clearly point to outright political censorship. With your decision, you are joining the attempts to once again turn universities into institutions in the service of militarism, as already happened on two occasions in the 20th century, with disastrous consequences, as you probably know.

Drop your censorship and stop preventing students at Goethe University from freely discussing a solution to the war and its fatal consequences.

F. Dubois

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It is totally unacceptable that the Protestant Student Community Frankfurt refuses to allow the planned and already confirmed meeting of the IYSSE in its rooms. Even if there are ideological differences between the ESG and the IYSSE, a meeting calling for peace in Ukraine should also be possible in Christian rooms, especially since young people from Russia as well as Ukraine can be connected online, calling for peace, mutual respect and rejecting the hateful propaganda of their respective governments. From the start, the IYSSE has condemned the attack by the Putin regime as well as the fuelling of the conflict by the NATO powers along with its deliveries of arms.

U. Schmidt-Schladebach

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Combined with an appeal to trust in the freedom of research and teaching at Frankfurt University, you are preventing a meeting that warns of the danger to this very freedom. Blind trust, however, is not a scientific virtue. An institution like yours, which is committed to science, inspires trust not by command and suppression, but by opening itself up to doubt and criticism and thus proving itself to be trustworthy. As a former student, I remember the exemplary and critical way in which the Frankfurt University in the Bockenheim Social Building exposed its gradual subordination to German imperialism, fascism and militarism between 1933 and 1945 (the timeline exhibited on the first floor). This invitation to mistrust and criticism, this open warning of the possible perversion of science into imperialist, racist and militarist barbarism was confidence-inspiring. The ban on a meeting critical of imperialism, militarism and academic conformity can be read as a warning. Is mistrust in the freedom of research and teaching in Frankfurt still unfounded? Prove it!

Florian Braun, Norway

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I thought the word "Protestant" had something to do with protest against the status quo.

I found this on the front page of your website:

"It should however symbolize, that we keep a critical eye on developments in society and church. The rooster stands for the fearless calling out of injustice and seeks to encourage us, to stand up for peace and equality. To take responsibility."

Why are you so hostile to the IYSSE which is trying to do just that? How can you justify censoring IYSSE?

Doug Nielson

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am appealing not to faith but to reason with this protest against your decision to cancel the room booked by the IYSSE on the Westend Campus at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University.

You doubt the "capacity for discourse" on the part of young people who invite participation in a public political debate? You do not believe in a conviction for "freedom of teaching and research" on the part of young people who inscribe anti-militaristic thought into their basic programme? If you, too, no longer believe, then use your reason! Join the discussion!

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Your political contribution cannot be to prevent discussion and thereby acting in a highly anti-democratic way yourself, substituting political action with a dogmatism that passes judgement before the process has taken place.

You have not listened to the IYSSE, to understand that the revolutionary force of the working class is not against the equality of people as a whole. Join the discussion! You have also not listened to the IYSSE to understand that the logic of social development does not exclude the concept of "plurality." Discuss with us! Dialectical materialism does not threaten you because "God's image" is not a premise. You yourself threaten this pronounced principle by being discriminatory. You are thereby carrying out anti-democratic censorship!

If academic-political discourse must stop because of individual moral considerations, then it is you who can no longer refer to freedom.

Please understand this protest also as an invitation to discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Nadine Hansen

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Dear Evangelical Student Community,

I recommend that you allow the IYSSE meeting against the war in Ukraine to go ahead as planned, according to contract and according to norms of academic freedom in the interest of criticism. There are very good reasons for people to be opposed to NATO expansion along the borders of Russia, the rise of fascism across Europe and in the Ukrainian government, and the threat of a US-led world war against Russia and China, which poses a danger to human survival. The ratcheting up of militarism only avoids the needs of society in this era of climate crisis—and the US military is the biggest polluter on earth.

While the neoliberal governments in the West place all of the blame for the conflict in Ukraine on Russia and demonize Vladimir Putin, any rational analysis of the situation and potential solution must take into account the concerns of the Russian federation. This is acknowledged by even the reprehensible architect of US foreign policy Henry Kissinger. The rest is warmongering in the interest of American unipolarity, which is now causing an economic crisis in Europe and the US. The solution to this crisis on the part of the West is more militarism.

Any observer of the 20th century would not fail to notice that militarism is proposed as the solution to economic crisis by governments that are incompetent, because of debt and corruption, imperialist and chauvinistic. It's a sad state of affairs that there is no one in the German government, only a few individual representatives, who are advocates for a negotiated settlement to this conflict, which will inevitably allow Russia to maintain possession of the Crimea and parts of the Donbas. Unfortunately we have this problem in Canada as well, where the social democrats have become the lapdogs of the neoliberals.

The only real question is how many more must die before reason prevails. The death toll is now approximately 300,000 Ukrainians dead and approximately 50,000 Russians dead (some say more). The US state is clearly prepared to raise the death toll and shows the same indifference in this conflict as in its previous "War on Terror" fiascos and laying waste to entire societies in Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Libya and elsewhere. The fact that you cannot even allow a serious discussion of these issues is evidence that those who defend and seek to benefit from this deadly status quo fear public discussion and criticism of war. I would add that there is no equivalence between right-wing extremists and left-wing people of conscience on these and similar issues. To defend humanity is to defend socialism.

Neoliberalism is breeding contradictions that are being solved in the direction of fascism and militarism. One is tempted to say that as Germans you should know better. However, I resist this localization of blame. As brothers and sisters worldwide we must work together for peace, solidarity, the flourishing of creativity and the emancipation of societies worldwide.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marc James Léger

Montreal, Canada

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express in the clearest terms my protest regarding the cancellation on your part of the meeting against the Ukraine war by the youth organisation of the Socialist Equality Party, the IYSSE.

The democratic right to informative, free expression of opinion must be upheld and defended.

Yours sincerely,

L. Niklaus

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I hereby wish to inform you that your reasons for cancelling the meeting are nonsensical and, in my opinion, you suffer from a democratic deficit. Clearly you are firmly in the tradition of the Church of Authoritarianism. How you want to reconcile war and the Bible, plurality and censorship is a mystery to me.

Yours sincerely,

Joachim Pförtner

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My purpose in writing is to respectfully ask that you reverse your decision to illegally cancel the room rented to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). The Ukraine-Russia conflict is nothing more than great power machinations that threaten to destroy the whole of civilization/humanity. The US/NATO, for instance, refuses to engage in negotiations to reach a peaceful, sustainable settlement, and instead continues to press Ukraine to pursue a war that has already resulted in hundreds of thousands of lives lost and the massive displacement of the civilian population.

Standing for peace in such circumstances is the duty of every person. It is the only way to stop this conflict that will very likely escalate into a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO. Again, please reverse your decision to illegally cancel the room it rented to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

Respectfully yours,

George A. Gonzalez

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To whom it may concern.

I strongly protest your cancellation of room rental to the IYSSE for the anti-war meeting to discuss the war in Ukraine. Marxists have a right and a duty to prevent another bloodbath in Europe.

Felix Kreisel,

Cambridge, Mass.

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Good afternoon,

I was dismayed to read today that the ESG in Frankfurt has decided to censor the anti-war meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality next Friday by trying to take away their booked room. I will not go into the individual reasons they give (and why they are invalid). That would go beyond the scope of this email and is anyway listed better than I could in this article: https://www.wsws.org/de/articles/2023/05/07/iyse-m07.html.

At this point I only want to call on you to give the IYSSE the room allocated and, as an association in a democratic country, to observe and respect basic democratic rights!

Respectfully,

Clemens Bauer

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To the Protestant Student Community!

I protest in the strongest possible terms against your decision to deny the

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IYSSE rooms for its anti-war meeting, which you had previously authorised.

In doing so, you seek to prevent a voice being raised against the criminal war in Ukraine. You want to silence critics of the vile war propaganda that dominates the mainstream media ad nauseam.

In view of the fact that those in power are currently preparing World War III and thus a nuclear "Armageddon" for the whole of humanity, as US President Biden put it, your attempt to lovingly support such political gangsters is disgraceful and irresponsible.

To also justify this decision by saying that the IYSSE has a "materialistic" worldview, i.e., does not believe in God, is grotesque hypocrisy.

Thomas L.

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I hereby protest in the strongest possible terms against the attempt to politically censor an anti-war meeting that the International Youth and Students for Social Equality—IYSSE—plans to hold on Friday 12 May at 18:30. The venue: ESG-Saal on the Westend Campus, in Frankfurt, has been contractually guaranteed to the IYSSE. Your attempt to deny the room to the IYSSE which aims to inform its audience about the political and historical background of the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and enable students to criticise the prevailing militarism and the war policy of the German and NATO governments, as well as the Russian government, is anti-democratic and an expression of political censorship. The IYSSE will not tolerate this.

As a long-time supporter of the IYSSE from Duisburg, I call on you to make the booked meeting space available for the meeting on 12 May 2023, in accordance with the contract.

Yours sincerely,

Elisabeth Zimmermann

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Dear members of the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde,

My name is Florian and I am currently studying in Ulm.

I was horrified to learn of your attempt to prevent a meeting of the IYSSE from taking place on your premises next Friday.

Especially here in Germany, in a country where the universities played such an important role in the preparation of the two world wars, I think universities have a great responsibility.

In this country, universities have been "brought into line" once before, and students have already participated in burning books.

I find it all the more appalling that you want to stop an IYSSE meeting. They are the only ones far and wide who have continuously campaigned against any slide back to these conditions.

In the name of the freedom of teaching and recalling the great responsibility universities have, I call on you to halt all attempts to prevent the IYSSE from holding its meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Florian Hasek

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I hereby protest against the room cancellation for the IYSSE meeting "How to stop the Ukraine war" at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt on 12 May 2023. This political censorship of critical students is a fundamental attack on democratic rights of opponents of war.

I strongly support the IYSSE's demand that the meeting take place as announced.

Many greetings,

Elisabeth Steinert

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Dear Protestant Student Community,

The upcoming IYSSE meeting, the room for which is being withheld in breach of contract, presents a legitimate perspective, the exercise and discussion of which has a rightful place in the university community. Denying the room, of which you are guilty, is tantamount to suppressing a political perspective. Even leaving aside the grim history of suppression of political and especially anti-war opinion in Germany and its universities, this denial of a room contradicts the aim of higher education to educate and enlighten.

I once again call upon you to release the room for the IYSSE meeting!

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Darren R. Southworth

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To the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG) team:

Today I read about your cancellation of a room booked by the IYSSE for an meeting on 12 May on the Westend campus of the University of Frankfurt.

The cancellation is quite clearly an illegal act of political censorship and has nothing to do with your alleged commitment to "freedom of teaching and research."

On the contrary, it is a suppression of the free and open discussion of the criminal war in Ukraine and recalls the inglorious role played by leading representatives of the Protestant Church in the Weimar Republic in supporting the Nazis.

I call on you to immediately withdraw the unlawful termination of the room rental.

In the hope you will do the right thing,

Johannes Peter Hartmann,

former sales director of Heidelberger Druckmaschinen in Asia

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Dear Student Community, Dear Dr. Spory,

I hereby protest against the cancellation of the IYSSE meeting at Frankfurt Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt/Main and urge the ban be withdrawn.

It seems to be a tradition of the church and the universities to uncritically support every course of government and suppress opponents of this course. We experienced something similar at the Humboldt University in Berlin. There too, militarism has been made acceptable and students who oppose are fought against and threatened. The *World Socialist Web Site* has already reported on this several times. Universities must not become cadre schools for militarism. At the same time, any support for militaristic politics is contrary to the church's commandments and principles.

Kind regards,

Hanne Levien

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I find it highly anachronistic and incomprehensible that the ESG Frankfurt has banned the holding of an IYSSE meeting on the Ukraine war. After all, this is a very complex, historical topic and all one hears on all channels is the demonisation of Putin, which —after the experiences with Goebbels—can only be met with mistrust. That is why I protest against the ban.

I still remember, for example, the Maidan meetings of 2014, which took place in Kiev and which certainly played a role in the relationship between the US, NATO and Russia. I would have liked to know more about their outcome. Likewise, I know that Ukrainians suffered particularly under Hitler's fascism.

For this and other reasons, I would love to attend the meeting and cannot understand why it was banned. In my experience, the IYSSE meetings are well researched and provide facts.

The horrors of war are immeasurable and I could never have imagined that it would once again come to the point where socialists would be

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banned from speaking about it.

It must be allowed that the public draw the necessary consequences from the experiences of the Third Reich.

You in the ESG have a particular responsibility to make this possible.

With kind regards,

Maria Kappes

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I protest in the strongest terms against the censorship of the anti-war meeting of the IYSSE at the University of Frankfurt! This direct attack on democratic rights represents a topsy-turvy world that promotes lies and condemns truth, as is exemplified by the inhumane treatment of Julian Assange. It is high time to turn this topsy-turvy world on its feet!

Francoise Thull

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen and student to express my outrage at the recent actions of the University of Frankfurt towards the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

I read with great dismay the article on the *World Socialist Web Site* detailing how the University of Frankfurt is attempting to censor an anti-war meeting organised by IYSSE. The fact that the University of Frankfurt is trying to suppress freedom of expression and the democratic right to freedom of assembly is extremely disturbing and represents a serious attack on democratic principles.

The IYSSE has the right to express its opinion and share its views in a public meeting, especially when it comes to such an important issue as peace. It is incomprehensible that the University of Frankfurt is trying to suppress these voices and stifle public debate.

I appeal to the University of Frankfurt to immediately withdraw these measures and ensure that the IYSSE and all other groups on campus have the right to express their opinions freely and without interference from the university administration.

I urge you to assume your responsibility as an academic institution and protect freedom of expression on your campus. I hope that you will take my concerns seriously and take action to ensure that IYSSE and other groups on campus have the right to express their opinions freely.

Yours sincerely,

Klaus Wagner

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For the attention of Evangelische Studierenden Gemeinde:

I am a retired English teacher from Amiens, France, a town close to dozens of war graves of French, British Commonwealth and German soldiers from World War I.

I wish to express my outrage at the decision of Frankfurt University to ban the meeting of the IYSSE opposing the NATO war in Ukraine.

The French bourgeoisie allied with the Nazi occupier in the Second World War and participated in the Holocaust and the massacre of the Resistance.

Any organisation which blocks the discussion on the historical continuity between the processes which gave rise to the world wars, Nazism and the current NATO war in Ukraine to break up Russia and seize the resources of Asia is complicit in the drive to World War III. They are preventing the development of the necessary consciousness in the youth and the working class to stop the looming nuclear Holocaust.

Students at Frankfurt University should redouble their determination to oppose the war and support the IYSSE in a struggle for a mass movement of the youth and workers to end it and end its source, capitalism and imperialism.

I demand that the room hired for the IYSSE meeting be made available.

Antoine Lerougetel

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Dear Sir or Madam,

As you know, on Friday a meeting of the IYSSE is due to take place on your premises. The topic is a perspective for ending the war in Ukraine. I was surprised that the ESG apparently does not want to allow this open discussion.

It may well be that the principles of the ESG do not coincide with those of the IYSSE. But the youth organisation pursues goals that you certainly do not reject—including that of securing peace in Ukraine. And it does so in a democratic sense.

This is a standpoint that you share. I quote from the ESG website:

"The red rooster stands for naming injustice and seeks to encourage people to intervene fearlessly in social and ecclesiastical processes and take responsibility. Especially today we find it important to stand up for peace and justice."

Therefore, I appeal to you to reconsider your decision and fearlessly accept this open discussion about a political political perspective for peace on 12 May.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Z., editor

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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