

# Stop the smear campaign against opponents of war at German universities! No to the tightening of the Higher Education Act!

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For weeks, the German media and establishment politicians have been running a campaign against anti-war students and activists at universities. This campaign reached a new level on Monday, when Berlin's Senator for Science (state minister) Ina Czyborra (Social Democratic Party—SPD) announced that the Senate (state executive) would tighten the Higher Education Act in order to reintroduce “the possibility of ex-matriculation [preventing students from graduating] in certain cases.”

According to Czyborra, the aim is to “introduce effective measures in the short term.” The justification being given for this move is an alleged violent attack by a Freie Universität (Free University—FU) student against a Zionist activist and FU student at the beginning of the month.

According to the *Tagesspiegel*, the Higher Education Act of North Rhine-Westphalia is to serve as a model for the Senate's amendment. This includes the possibility of “ex-matriculation as a disciplinary measure” in the event of “a deliberate criminal offence committed against a university member.”

Senator Czyborra announced that an amendment to the Higher Education Act would be passed by the Senate before the Easter break. She added that a “variety of measures” were necessary to establish “security on campus” and “protect Jewish students and staff from hatred.”

This is an attempt to advance a right-wing and authoritarian campaign by making use of a case that has not yet been legally clarified. According to media reports, Lahav Shapira, a 30-year-old Jewish FU student, was “hospitalised with broken bones in his face” after a 23-year-old pro-Palestinian fellow student allegedly punched and kicked him on a street in the nightlife district of Berlin-Mitte on February 2. The public prosecutor's office is assuming a “targeted attack” with an “antisemitic background.”

However, despite extensive media reports and a “special organisational structure” set up by the investigating authorities, information about the exact course of events has so far been imprecise and, in some cases, contradictory. For example, the police report speaks of an “argument” that initially developed between the two people, while the victim's companion states that there was “no discussion” beforehand.

The alleged perpetrator and the victim were known to each other. The victim gave a video interview to an Israeli media outlet while still in hospital, but without showing his injuries.

The context of the incident includes the fact that the injured party is known as a Zionist provocateur. Videos show Shapira attempting to disrupt a pro-Palestinian lecture theatre occupation at the FU in December, tearing down student anti-war posters and physically attacking political opponents.

The accused's point of view, however, is still unknown, as his lawyer has stated that he will wait for the “extensive police investigation” before making a statement.

Despite such discrepancies and complicating factors, the political establishment and the media have long since jumped on the case. At a “Fridays for Israel” rally in front of the Free University called by student organisations close to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Berlin CDU General Secretary Ottilie Klein and President of the German-Israeli Society Volker Beck were joined by the federal chair of the Green Party, Ricarda Lang, who attacked a pro-Palestinian demonstration taking place at the same time for, of all things, “turning the page on guilt.”

While the governing mayor of Berlin, Kai Wegner (CDU), called on university administrations to “take consistent action against antisemitism and actively intervene,” Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD) announced that she wanted to “sharpen up” the “legal means” available to universities.

There is now talk of the Senate parties also providing universities with the “legal means” to de-register students on a political basis. In the tabloid press, CDU university politician Adrian Grasse threatened:

We will make sure that the universities calm down again. To this end, we will provide university administrations with additional instruments, such as ex-matriculation. We need to act quickly!

Despite tactical differences, all of the parties agree on this course. Marcel Hopp, science policy spokesperson for the SPD parliamentary group, stated that he was “not yet convinced” by previous proposals, such as those of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the CDU, as political ex-matriculation was “not without constitutional law” problems and the measures taken had to be “legally tenable and practicable.”

Tobias Schulze, science policy spokesperson for the Left Party, called for university administrations to be given a “sharp sword.” In the *Tagesspiegel*, he worried that, depending on the draft law, the perpetrator would “first have to be legally convicted,” which would “as expected, take a long time.”

He suggested it might be more expedient to extend the maximum duration of bans, which can presently be imposed by university administrations without a court judgement. “We need to empower universities to intervene,” he said.

For its part, the FU administration immediately issued a three-month ban on the accused FU student, without any criminal trial having taking place.

The cross-party offensive has nothing whatsoever to do with the prevention of violence on or off campus. Rather, in the context of the current pro-war policy, it is unmistakably aimed at reversing the gains won in the class struggles and student mass protests of 1968, and reimposing at German universities the political conformity that prevailed before the First and Second World Wars. The cynical propaganda being employed in the name of “protecting Jewish students” turns reality on its head.

As the official student body of Humboldt University has correctly noted in a statement, the “necessary protection of Jewish students from antisemitism” is being invoked as a “pretext for enforcing repressive and authoritarian policies.”

The statement continues:

This is being driven forward, in particular, by the political forces that for years have been promoting the shift to the right and [have worked to make] antisemitic and racist ideologies acceptable.

The statement goes on to denounce “forced ex-matriculation” as an “instrument of power” that weakens the position of all students, and correctly calls it a “fundamentally political means” to “deliberately prevent the politicisation of students and protests at universities.”

In fact, Jewish students have been harassed by university administrations, the police and right-wing groups for months, while being slandered by the media. They have shared this treatment with all students who have protested against the Israeli regime’s genocidal war policy.

This month, for example, several well-known anti-Zionist activists—including “Jewish Voice” members Udi Raz and Rachael Shapiro—were arrested after speaking at peaceful rallies.

At Potsdam University, students who wanted to organise a rally against the massacre in Gaza in January were denied a room and banned from putting up posters or distributing leaflets on campus.

All protests against the Israeli war policy, which is supported politically and militarily by the German government, are slandered as “antisemitic” and “anti-Jewish” and linked to violence by corporate-owned media outlets such as *Die Welt*, but also by public media outlets such as the broadcasters ARD and ZDF. Anyone who rejects the radical right-wing ideology of the Israeli government and is not prepared to glorify the genocide of an

oppressed ethnic group as “self-defence” is branded as “anti-Jewish.”

Pro-government student organisations such as the Christian Democratic RCDS and the Jewish Student Union (JSUD), on the other hand, are uncritically promoted by the same media, even though they support a regime whose massacres have already killed tens of thousands of people.

Meanwhile, the violence experienced by Muslim and Arab workers and students is largely unreported by the media and ignored by the politicians. Following an arson attack on the largest seminar room of the Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University in November, unknown persons vandalised the “Room of Silence” that was used as a Muslim prayer room at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences at the beginning of this month.

Concurrently, professors are permitted to spread war propaganda and incitement with the full backing of the university administration. For example, Potsdam military historian Sönke Neitzel, speaking on the Markus Lanz talk show in October, called for “European aircraft carriers” to support Israel’s war efforts. The same month, his Humboldt colleague Ruud Koopmans, who is notorious for his Islamophobic and anti-refugee agitation, described Muslim calls to prayer as “100 percent equivalent” to the “Sieg heil!” of the Nazis.

Humboldt Professor Jörg Baberowski, who goes much further than Koopmans in his trivialisation of National Socialism (Nazism), has been appointed managing director of the Institute of History, despite having physically assaulted a student representative during the student parliament election campaign in 2020.

Now, because resistance to this propaganda is developing among students, the state apparatus is to be strengthened and the university administration mobilised to take action against politically unwelcome students. This must be stopped!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on all students, faculty, staff and workers to reject the right-wing moves of the Berlin Senate, defend democratic rights, and link the widespread opposition among students with the growing struggles of the working class in the fight against war and fascism.



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