

# Oppose the state-led censorship of German universities! Stop Berlin's new higher education law!

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Berlin State Senator for Education Ina Czyborra (Social Democrats, SPD) announced in mid-February that the state government, known as the Senate, would strengthen the Higher Education Act in order to reintroduce “the possibility of exmatriculation of students,” i.e., expelling them from the university. A leaked draft of the law has since made clear how far-reaching the crackdown is. The strengthening of the Higher Education Act is an attempt to whip the universities into line and reintroduce the principle of thought crimes.

While the public discussions so far have “only” discussed a possible exmatriculation after committing a crime, the leaked bill, which has been published by the Student Coalition Berlin and others, shows that the Senate is making even more far-reaching plans behind the scenes.

The draft law already allows for regulatory measures such as exmatriculation of students who “use or attempt to use university facilities for criminal offences.” This extremely imprecise formulation criminalizes any form of protest. From lecture hall occupations to “From the river to the sea” slogans, any protest can be interpreted as a criminal offence and lead to exmatriculation.

The draft law also provides that regulatory measures such as exmatriculation and “exclusion from the use of university facilities” can be imposed merely if a student “violates the dignity of a member of the university for reasons of racist attribution or because of ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual identity,” and “the study or other activity of this member is threatened by the violation of dignity or the environment it creates.”

This prosecution of ideas means the state's co-option

of the universities. Virtually any criticism of the Israeli army's actions against the Palestinians is defamed as antisemitic and could therefore serve as a pretext for disciplinary measures. The same applies to the widespread opposition among students to right-wing and militarist professors.

The imposition of disciplinary measures, such as exmatriculation, is decided by a regulatory committee, the composition of which is determined by the universities in their statutes. Even the president of the Technical University of Berlin, Geraldine Rauch, explained: “It is to be expected that in the current highly charged atmosphere in society, a kind of layman's court such as the regulatory committee will not be able to make objective and legally valid decisions.” She warned against the introduction of “university justice,” which “has no legal legitimacy.”

The new university law intensifies the censorship of opponents of war, which has been taking place for years. As early as 2014, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) was denounced by the Humboldt University administration, the media and politicians from all parties for criticising the right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski. He declared in *Der Spiegel* that Hitler was “not vicious” and that the Nazi war of extermination was only a reaction to the Red Army's warfare.

Student initiatives such as the blog “Münkler-Watch,” which uncovered and documented the militarist lectures of Humboldt Professor Herfried Münkler, were also met with a smear campaign by the media, the federal government and the university administration.

Under conditions of the genocide in Gaza and

Germany's aggressive war policy, the censorship of opponents has reached a new climax. In November 2023, the university prohibited the IYSSE from holding an event against the genocide in Gaza at Humboldt University. All other student organizations speaking out against the genocide were also censored.

This criminalization is now being cast into law. The aim is to get rid of all those from the university who speak out against the militarization of universities and against Israel's genocide and its support by Germany. As before the First and Second World Wars, the universities are to be co-opted by the state and transformed into militarised camps to train the cadre for German imperialism.

In reality, widespread opposition exists among students to the return of German militarism. Hundreds of students participated in rallies against the genocide in Gaza organized by the IYSSE alongside other groups at the Ruhr University in Bochum and Berlin's Humboldt University. The Student Coalition Berlin and numerous student organizations have held several protests against the genocide in recent months.

In order to prevent protests against this authoritarian law as much as possible, the Berlin Senate is trying to push it through during the semester break. The state association of student councils was also given only four working days during the review stage to take a position on the draft law. Nevertheless, numerous student representatives have already published statements against the Senate's plans.

The student council at Humboldt University warned in an earlier statement that by strengthening the law, the "necessary protection of Jewish students from antisemitism" would be misused as a "pretext for enforcing repressive and authoritarian policies." In its latest newsletter, the council described it as a "challenge to political organisation at Berlin's universities and to any politicisation at the universities." Student councils at the Free University and Technical University Berlin have also published similar statements.

In its press statement, the state association of student councils spoke of "the most serious and repressive intervention in the political participation of students for over 50 years," and a "gateway to the right to adjudicate on ideas."

It further explained: "Regulatory measures—in

particular compulsory exmatriculation—constitute a serious interference into basic rights. This is especially the case as the facts presented goes so far as to potentially affect any political actions by students—from disrupting events to putting up posters and public statements about lecturers. Everything could be covered."

A petition started by the group Students for Palestine at FU (Free University), which has already been signed over 3,800 times, states:

If tougher action is possible at universities than elsewhere, then this is an attack on dissenters and thus on academic freedom. And if measures are permitted at universities that particularly affect international students, this is an attack on marginalized groups and the diversity of institutions...

Considering the infamous history of exmatriculation as a regulatory measure, a tool of reactionary forces against dissenters, it is not surprising that the AfD [Alternative for Germany] has exhumed this toolkit again and that the conservative camp in particular is pushing for its reintroduction.

The IYSSE welcomes this opposition. The struggle against dictatorship means a struggle against war and its root, capitalism. Millions of workers around the world are outraged by Israel's genocide against the Palestinians and the German government's war policy, and are themselves facing wage cuts and the suppression of democratic rights. In recent months, workers in the transport sector have repeatedly paralyzed the country with their strikes. The fight against war, genocide and fascism must rely on the tremendous social force represented by the working class.



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